1

The Communist Party of Iraq

Origins and Foundations

The introduction of Marxist thought in Iraq must be accredited to Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl (1901–1981), who, though he never became a communist himself, was the first to introduce Marxist thought into intellectual circles in Baghdad. Al-Raḥḥâl was a high school student in Berlin in 1919 when the Spartacist uprising, an attempt by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) to seize control of Berlin, took place; this event left a deep impression on him, and kindled his interest in socialism and Marxism.[1] Returning to Iraq a year later, and profoundly affected by the unstable conditions of the country, under British occupation, he gradually started to teach Marxist and socialist thought. However, in his last days he expressed deep disappointment:

> With the seeds I have sown and worked so hard to intellectually nurture . . . I wanted to create an intellectual environment where scientific socialism would be the base of inquiry to understand our backward conditions, but we ended up somewhere else. . . . The impoverishment of Marxist thought today [1973] is much more alarming because it is much more regressive than it was fifty years earlier.[2]

Iraq Before the First World War

The history of modern Iraq can be traced back to 1749 when the Ottoman Sultan appointed Sulimân Aghâ Abû-lailah, a Georgian Mamluk officer who was the governor of Basra (1749–1761), to the position of Wâlî (governor) of Baghdad. This appointment initiated the establishment of a semi-autonomous state in Iraq under Mamluk suzerainty. Although formally appointed by the Ottoman Sultan, a succession of Mamluks formed a dynasty that in effect ruled Iraq for the next eight decades. Even so, Mamluk control over Iraq was always incomplete because of overlapping jurisdictional rights in the

[1] For an overview of al-Raḥḥâl's life, see Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 389–404.
[2] Interview by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl, Baghdad (19 October 1973).

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empire.[3] An Ottoman focus on potential Persian incursions into the territory forced Mamluk officials and the Sublime Porte[4] into grudging cooperation, so that despite their efforts, Mamluk rule over Iraq was "restricted to fluctuating success over an 80 year period . . . and the downfall of the Mamluk regime in 1831 meant the unwelcome restoration of alien rule in [the city of] Baghdad."[5] The city's population had grown from twenty thousand inhabitants in the seventeenth century to one hundred thousand by 1800, and had reached some hundred fifty thousand in 1831,[6] at the time Mamluk rule ended.

Dâûd Pasha, the last of the Mamluk rulers (1817–1831), instituted political and economic policies that successfully united what was to constitute modern Iraq. By steering the country even further away from Istanbul's control, he was also able to reduce the influence of C. J. Rich, the British resident in Baghdad, and of representatives of the British East India Company. In a move that gained him popular support, particularly among Iraq's merchants, Dâûd Pasha also forced the British to pay duties on all imported goods, taxes from which they had previously been exempt.

Dâûd Pasha modelled his rule on that of Muḥammad ʿAlî in Egypt. Like Muḥammad ʿAlî, he strove to create a modern centralized governmental infrastructure. He initiated governmental reforms, restored law and order, and created judicial and educational institutions. He also modernized the army, enlarging it to approximately one hundred thousand men; built factories; established a newspaper; and organized irrigation works.[7] As noted by the scholar Tom Nieuwenhuis, "The previous [Mamluk] period of local rule becomes significant, marking an era . . . for local progress . . . [in which] schools, baths, mosques, khans [inns] . . . and *suqs* (markets) [were built or expanded]."[8] One distinguished Iraqi economist, Muḥammad Salmân Ḥasan, considers Dâûd and his reign to be a first attempt at independent economic development – however embryonic – in the modern history of Iraq. In 1831, at the instigation of the British, the Ottoman army marched into Baghdad and arrested Dâûd Pasha. Dâûd was imprisoned for the rest of his life and the Mamluk elite was removed from power, thus ending Iraq's first experiment in autonomy.[9]

[3] Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf: 1745–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Thabit Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); and Thabit Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks and Murder: The Political Economy of Commerce in Eighteenth Century Basra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[4] An administrative department directly related to Istanbul and not under the Mamluk Pasha.

[5] Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq: Mamluk Pashas, Tribal Shayks and Local Rule Between 1802 and 1831* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 171.

[6] ʿAbd al-Aziz al-Duri, "Baghdad," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1960), p. 925.

[7] ʿUthmân Ibn Suʿûd al-Baṣrî al-Wâilî, *Khamsah wa Khamsûn ʿÂm min Târîkh al-ʿIrâq 1188–1242-Wa Mukhtaṣar Maṭâliʿ al-Suʿûd Biṭayyibî Akhbâr al-Wâlî Dâûd* (Cairo 1371H), p. 2; Zaki Saleh, *Mesopotamia (Iraq), 1600–1914* (Baghdad: al-Rabitah Press, 1957), p. 133; Sulaimân Fâʾiq, *Târîkh Baghdad*, trans. Mûsâ Kâdhim Nûras (Baghdad: al-Maʿârif Press, 1962), p. 61.

[8] Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, p. 173.

[9] Muḥammad Salmân Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1965), pp. 30–33. See also Ḥalîm Aḥmad, *Mûjaz Târîkh al-ʿIrâq al-Ḥadîth* (Beirut:

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The restoration of direct rule from Istanbul coincided with the "emergence of British influence in Iraq"; according to Nieuwenhuis, both the Turks and the British were largely responsible for the "retarded" development of Iraq.[10] Nevertheless, with its return to Ottoman control Iraq began to be feel the affects of the politics and enlightened reforms then taking place in Istanbul and which, in 1839, initiated the "Age of Tanzimat." In this environment, law, diplomacy, government administration, and education were all modernized, and secular ideas and democratic principles were introduced.

In 1868, Midḥat Pasha, a leading advocate of reform, became the first president of Council of State in Istanbul, one of the two most important institutions of the Tanzimat. The following year he was appointed Wâlî of Baghdad (1869–1872) and from this position put his reform ideas into practice. He centralized government rule, established law and order, surveyed the land, instituted land reforms that gave peasants some protection and reduced feudal control, reestablished modern education, and built factories, in essence reinstating the programme of Dâûd Pasha's government. He also established a newspaper, *Al-Zawrâ'*, importing a special press for the purpose; the paper survived him by half a century. Most government revenue was spent on public projects, and little was sent to the treasury in Istanbul. Partly as a result of his success in Iraq, court jealousies and intrigue led to Midḥat Pasha's recall three years later, though he soon took over the prime ministership of the empire. According to one Iraqi educator and literary figure, writing in 1930:

> As soon as Midḥat Pasha entered Baghdad . . . he began studying Iraqi conditions and its finances from the perspectives of security, administration, order, education, industry, agriculture, economics, and health, and [the creation of] a modern infrastructure. . . . he announced his intention of implementing his program, and soon worked to put this into action. Although he was gentle and respectful, he was serious about its implementation. In a few days, the signs of reform and prosperity began to appear [in the country] and the social conditions were on the verge of a dramatic transformation. People were happy, justice prevailed and rights were respected. Three years later, in 1873, in Government House, with a grim face, he declared, "This is what I promised you and God the day I met you in this place, and I would have fulfilled this but for the misfortune [of having to leave]. I bid you farewell, my dear Iraqi friends. . . . " With tearful eyes [his audience] responded.[11]

In 1876, Iraq entered a renewed constitutional experiment under the Ottoman Sultan ᶜAbd-ul-Ḥamîd II, who was brought to power by the reformist Midḥat Pasha, now the Grand Vizier, and his liberal compatriots in Istanbul. The newly enthroned ᶜAbd-ul-Ḥamîd II promulgated this constitutional experiment on 23 December 1876. However, it came to an abrupt end when ᶜAbd-ul-Ḥamîd II reversed his views, sending Midḥat Pasha into exile in Mecca and

Dâr Ibn Khaldûn, n.d.), pp. 31–33. For an excellent history of the Mamluk period in Iraq, see ᶜAbbâs al-ᶜAzzâwî, *Târîkh al-ᶜIrâq Baina Iḥtilâlain*, vol. 6 (Baghdad: Sharikat al-Tijârah wa al-Ṭibâᶜah, 1954).

[10] Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, p. 171.

[11] Fahmî al-Mudarris, *Alᶜ Âlam al-ᶜArabî*, no. 1965 (Baghdad, 9 August 1930).

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initiating a period of despotic rule and corruption that ended with the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908. This powerful military Pan-Turkish nationalist clique, which led Turkey into World War I, practised a policy of Turkification that roused and angered many Ottoman Arabs, including the Iraqis, especially those making up the embryonic intelligentsia.

In their opposition to Turkification, Ottoman Arabs used secret societies and clandestine Arabic newspapers to advance the nationalist cause; as non-Turkish separatist movements in the empire (e.g., in Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Crete) became more vocal, they inspired Arab nationalists in Iraq and Syria. Arab officers in Istanbul, the most influential group in society to benefit from these developments and exposure to technical (often Western) training, assumed important roles within the growing underground movement. Iraqi officers, who were often the most prominent members of secret societies like *al-ʿAhd* that were formed among the Arab components of the Ottoman army, committed themselves to working for Arab independence. Similar in purpose to *al-ʿAhd* in Iraq, a branch of the Ottoman Decentralization Party – *al-ʿUṣbah al-Ḥamra* – was founded in Cairo for the purpose of winning equality and autonomy for the Arab provinces within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. Even though such efforts weakened the Ottoman Empire in the face of European encroachment, many Arabs regarded their demands for decentralization as necessary to protect their cultural and linguistic identity in the face of the reforms emanating from Istanbul. With the return of the constitution in 1908, and with branches of Arab nationalist societies beginning to appear, predominantly in Basra and Baghdad but also in Mosul and other Iraqi cities, the seeds of political and social awakening grew rapidly.

In addition, Arab newspapers and journals proliferated, with the number of dailies in Iraq rising from a single one between 1894 and 1904 to sixty-one between 1904 and 1914. Even though many existed only for a short period before Ottoman efforts to closed them, the flowering of a new intellectual expression took hold of the Arab population. Following the introduction of the modern printing press, Egyptian journals and newspapers became readily available to other Arabs and facilitated greater contact between the rising young intellectual class in Iraq and the rest of the Arab world. The increased availability of Arabic journals through the foreign postal services – bypassing Ottoman censorship – acted as a catalyst in the rapid development of socialist consciousness throughout Iraq. Journals such as *Al-Muqtaṭaf, Al-Hilâl, Al-Siyâsah*, and *Al-Muqaṭṭam* soon became part of the regular diet of discerning members of Iraq's emerging educated classes.[12]

Foreign Influences

In addition to Arabic journals, the publications of the Communist Party of Britain also began to circulate among a limited number of intellectuals in Iraq,

[12] For more detail, see Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cope, 1937), pp. 222–236.

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including al-Raḥḥâl, who translated them into Arabic and held discussions about them with his friends in Baghdad. At the same time, the French Communist Party newspaper, *L'Humanité*, available to those Iraqis who spoke French, was also translated into Arabic and made available to Raḥḥâl's circle. The development of socialist thought among Iraqis was further influenced by the progressive foreign socialists who worked with the British in Iraq. Among these was a Scotsman, Donald M. McKenzie, who opened McKenzie's Bookshop in Baghdad in 1925 and operated it until his death in 1946. McKenzie made a number of foreign books, especially those examining socialist ideas, available at cost to young Iraqi socialists, while selling them at a profit to the British and to wealthy Iraqis.[13] His wife also played an important role in spreading socialist ideas among women's groups and was credited with connecting these groups through the first Eastern Women's Congress, held in Damascus in July 1930.[14] In addition, between 1919 and 1926 an Australian named Riley, who worked as a teacher in the British Department of Education in Mosul before becoming the director of education, gave lectures on social conditions, informed by socialist notions, to students and the Iraqi elite. Returning to Australia in 1926, he took up journalism and ended up in China, where he was killed. Finally, McKenzie's wife and an American woman by the name of Miss Kerr lectured in girls' clubs and schools in Baghdad, where socialist notions were also advanced.[15]

Russians and Iraqis had limited contact until World War I, when, as part of the Ottoman armies, Iraqi soldiers and officers met their Russian adversaries on the Russian front. Interaction between civilian Iraqis and Russians following Russia's October 1917 revolution was also limited, but the opinion of Iraqis who did encounter the revolutionaries was favourable to the Bolsheviks. When the Ottoman armies were retreating in early 1917, the Russian forces occupying the northern and western parts of Ottoman Iraq treated the population humanely, and in this environment, some of the Russian soldiers who were politically inclined towards Bolshevist notions spread the seeds of those ideas, which the Iraqis began to propagate.

In addition, because Kurds and Arabs who became Russian prisoners of war (POWs) after the Russian revolution were treated well, they began to spread vague revolutionary notions on their return to Iraq. Some become known in Iraq as Bolsheviks. One such Baghdadi, known as Bolshevik Ṣâliḥ (1892–1973), adopted his nom de guerre and used it for the rest of his life. In a 1968 interview he remarked:

> My contact with the Bolsheviks was a humane one, and even when I was in captivity during the Tsarist period I could tell from the way our guards treated us who was a Bolshevik and who was not. As soon as the revolution took place I was freed, and

[13] See Muḥsin Dizaya, *ʾAḥdâth ʿÂṣartuhâ* (Erbil, Kurdistan: Aras, 2001), p. 164.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Interviews by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl and Zakî Khairî, Baghdad (18 January 1976).

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became part of the comradeship, which is how I acquired my name – and I am proud of it. Although I have never been a communist, I thought the Bolsheviks were very caring, and thus, their ideology must also be of that nature.[16]

In Iraqi Kurdistan, returning Kurds were also dubbed Bolsheviks,[17] and in the religious centres of Shiʿism in Najaf and Karbala, the same appellation was applied simultaneously to many returnees. Some Shiʿi ʿUlama believed that the Bolsheviks were favourably inclined towards Islam, and soon after World War I, the Mosul branch of *al-ʿAhd* society, in a letter sent to the headquarters in Damascus, called for the formation of an Islamic-German and Bolshevik alliance to challenge the colonialist occupiers.[18]

When al-Raḥḥâl left Iraq around 1914, the country was one of the most remote and least developed provinces of the Ottoman Empire. According to Hanna Batatu, prior to the British military campaign during World War I "private property, in the sense of private appropriation of the means of production, was non-existent outside Iraq's towns and their immediate hinterland, and even in the towns had a precarious basis . . . exposed to recurring confiscation."[19] Some incipient economic classes existed in the towns, but only in a "rudimentary form and in parallel structures within the recognized religious communities," and nationwide social classes had yet to emerge.[20] Iraqi "society" still remained deeply divided along ethnic and sectarian lines, with Sunni Muslims in privileged positions and with very little interaction and few common interests among the various other segments of the population.

Around 75 per cent of Iraq's population was Arab, with Kurds, Persians, Turkomans, Armenians, and some smaller groups making up the remaining 25 per cent. The vast majority of the population were Muslim, divided between Shiʿi and Sunni. However, there were also some small Christian, Jewish, and Sabean minorities. Out of a total population of 2.25 million at the turn of the twentieth century, 59 per cent were rural peasants, 17 per cent were nomadic and seminomadic herders, and only 24 per cent were urban dwellers;[21] in total, only one per cent of the population was literate.[22]

Internal social stratification was based on a hierarchy of status that gave special privileges to the holders of religiously based positions, such as *sadah*, or descent from the Prophet, and to the leaders of the Ṣûfî orders, as well as to Sunni and Shiʿi ʿ*Ulama* (religious leaders) and to the *chalabis* (rich merchants) who were concentrated mainly in Baghdad, in addition to the small group of high Ottoman officials (mainly of non-Iraqi origin) who ruled the

[16] Interview by author with Bolshevik Ṣâliḥ, Baghdad (18 March, 1968).
[17] Jalâl al-Ṭâlabânî, *Kurdistân wa al-Ḥarakah al-Kurdiyyah* (Beirut: Dâr al-Ṭalîʿah, 1969), p. 58.
[18] ʿÂmir Ḥasan Faiyyâḍ, "Judhûr al-Fikr al-ʾIshtirâkî fî al-ʿIrâq, 1920–1934" (MA thesis, College of Law and Politics, Baghdad, December 1978), pp. 233–240.
[19] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 8.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 52.
[22] Hâshim Jawâd, *Muqaddimah fi Kiyân al-ʿIrâq al-Ijtimâʿî* (Baghdad: al-Maʿârif Press, 1946), p. 104.

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country. The privileged strata together constituted a very small proportion of the population. A small middle class made up of professionals, artisans, and domestic merchants occupied another level, while the vast majority of the urban population consisted of poor service workers. An industrial working class was virtually non-existent until the late 1920s,[23] and in the countryside the tribal system, which had existed for centuries, was still largely intact. The *Shaikh al-Mashâyikh* (chief of tribal confederations), the *shaikhs* (leaders) of the tribes among the Arabs, and the tribal *begs* (community sub-leaders) or *aghas* (tribal chiefs) among the Kurds remained in firm control of the affairs of their tribal communities. All in all, Iraq was a mosaic of social groups, stratified along tribal, religious, class, and ethnic lines. Each community lived in accordance with its inherited traditional patterns, into which it assimilated foreign influences and modern practices. In other words, historic and inherited cultural norms were more complex in nature, and had been passed down from the time of the Sumerians, and more recently, from the Abbassid period in the eighth century. These values allowed communities to adapt to change and to adopt new ideas and ways of living, initially difficult for Westerners to comprehend.

British Ascendancy

Britain's penetration of the Persian Gulf in the seventeenth century, as a direct result of the merging of British government and British East India Company interests, led to its eventual control of the Iraqi Tigris and Euphrates valleys during the First World War. The British East India Company initiated commercial activity in Basra in 1635, and established its first factory there eight years later, making Basra an important outpost for the company in the region. Later, in 1764, Britain opened an official consulate in Basra to consolidate British political and economic influence and to replace the British East India Company representative. The British presence was expanded further in 1798, when a permanent residency opened in Baghdad. Eventually, Baghdad became the centre of British activities in Arabia, replacing Basra as a response to heightened French interest in Iraq, which was masked by Napoleon's challenge to British control of India at the end of the eighteenth century.[24] By 1834, the introduction of gunboats on the Tigris had created a safe environment for transport on the river, thus increasing British economic penetration. Thus during the mid-nineteenth century, Iraq became incorporated into the British imperial market system, and Ottoman Iraq was transformed into an area of vital British influence and interest. According to one student of British foreign policy in Iraq, the British viewed Iraq as the cornerstone of the survival of the British Indian Empire: "This conception, originating with the British about the year 1830, and developing during the ensuing four decades, was firmly established by

[23] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 11.

[24] ʿAbd-ul-Raḥmân al-Bazzâz, *Al-ʿIrâq min al-Iḥtilâl Ḥattâ al-Istiqlâl*, 3rd ed. (Baghdad: al-ʿÂnî Press, 1967), p. 46, and Aḥmad, *Mûjaz Târîkh al-ʿIrâq al-Ḥadîth*, p. 43.

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the year 1878.... Mesopotamia was virtually turned into a British sphere of influence."[25]

By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, some changes started to become noticeable. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the development of powered transportation on the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, made Iraq more accessible to penetration by products and ideas from the outside world, particularly those of British origin.[26] This caused a decline in indigenous commerce and production, reducing Iraq to the status of a dependent market for British goods and a source of cheap raw materials for British industry, and increasingly connecting Iraq to the international, imperial market. In contrast to the trend up to the late eighteenth century, when Iraqi trade had been predominantly with other Middle Eastern countries, Iraqi commerce now was mainly with industrial Europe in general, and with Britain in particular.[27] Indeed, the value of European imports coming into Iraq through Basra increased from £51,000 in 1868–1870 to £3,066,000 by 1907–1909.[28] A large part of these imports consisted of inexpensive British-made textiles, whose growing influx caused the gradual ruin of the domestic handloom industry in Iraq, as had previously occurred in both Lebanon and Syria. At the same time, however, Iraq's agricultural production rose rapidly. From the 1860s to the 1920s, grain production increased by around one per cent per annum, and the yield of dates increased by even greater margins. In addition, the area under cultivation expanded, from perhaps less than 100,000 *dunums* in the 1860s to about 1,613,000 *dunums* by 1913.[29] The character of crop production also underwent a transformation, from the peasant subsistence economy that had previously prevailed to an economy based on cash crops, mainly cereal grains, the export of which increased about twenty times over the periods 1867–1871 and 1912–1913.[30]

On the eve of the First World War, Great Britain's standing as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf was about to enter a new phase. Three centuries of Britain's efforts to expand and protect its trade, as well as to increase its diplomatic and strategic influence and to protect the land route to India from domination by other powers, were settled through negotiated agreements. Over

[25] Zaki Saleh, *Mesopotamia (Iraq), 1600–1914: A Study in British Foreign Affairs* (Baghdad: al-Maaref Press, 1957), p. 170. For details on the Gulf region and Iraq, see Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), pp. 37–53.

[26] Ibid., p. 239. On the eve of World War I, Britain's share of the trade in Iraq and the Gulf area amounted to £9,600,000, about three-quarters of the total; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: KPI, 1987), p. 7.

[27] Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 87.

[28] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 239–240.

[29] Ḥasan, "The Role of Foreign Trade in Economic Development in Iraq, 1864–1964: A Study in the Growth of a Dependent Economy," in M. A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 350. See note 50 for the dimensions of the *dunum*.

[30] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 3.

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a series of meetings and exchanges dating from 1909 to 1913, Great Britain achieved recognition of its position from Germany, from France, and from the government of the Ottoman Empire. Under the terms of the Anglo-Turkish Agreement, signed on 29 July 1913, Britain completed its de facto annexation of the Persian Gulf and cemented its dominant position within the Mesopotamian *vilayets* (provinces) of the Ottoman Empire. Further, it secured recognition of its "special position" in the Persian Gulf and of the validity of its existing treaties with the sheikdoms of Kuwait and Bahrain; limited the terminus of the Baghdad railway to Basra (beyond which the rail line could not be extended without British consent); gained sole control over the development of the port of Basra and the city of Baghdad (thereby denying port facilities in the Gulf to Germany or any other power); and achieved Ottoman recognition of its right to buoy, to light, and to police the Shaṭ al-ʿArab and the Persian Gulf. These measures were seen as insurance for British claims on Mesopotamia in the event of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire.[31]

In attempting to extend its influence in the region further, Britain used the agreement to control access to water. In this way British authorities could promote economic growth through agriculture and control revenue assessment and collection despite the shared role it was to have with Germany in developing irrigation for the Cilician Plain in Asia Minor. Finally, the Ottoman oilfields were transferred to British control, and Germany was forced to recognize further oil exploration in southern Mesopotamia and in southern Persia as the exclusive domain of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. However, because of diplomatic concerns requiring Britain and Germany to heed deliberations by the French, Italian, and Russian representatives, the Anglo-German Agreement was not signed until 15 July 1914, and ratification was further delayed until separate Turko-German negotiations were concluded.

With the outbreak of World War I on 28 July 1914, the Anglo-German treaty and its considerations were, in effect, nullified, and in the ensuing conflict British arms were required to confirm what British commerce and diplomacy had established before the war. With Britain's occupation of Basra in 1914, then of Baghdad in 1917, and finally, of Mosul in 1918, as well as with treaty arrangements farther south in the Gulf proper, British hegemony became incontestable, and suzerainty passed – without the consent or involvement of the region's Arab population – from the Ottomans to the British Empire. The cost to Britain was immense, involving over two hundred million pounds and some hundred thousand casualties in the Mesopotamia campaign.

Commensurate with those developments was the population's growing tendency towards sedentarization, and the increase in the number of peasants who cultivated the land. Indeed, the percentage of nomads among the region's rural

[31] For a discussion of British diplomacy in the treaty, see Jill Crystal (ed.), *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); see also Richard Schofield (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq Border: 1840–1958*, 11 vol. (Buckingham, UK: Archive Editions, 1989), for a copy of the 1929 Anglo-Turkish Agreement.

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population fell from 35 per cent to 17 per cent between 1867 and 1905, while the percentage of cultivators increased from 41 per cent to 59 per cent. By using the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, tribal *shaikhs*, former tax farmers,[32] and rich city merchants began to acquire title deeds (*tapu sanads*) to previously state-owned or communally held properties.[33] On the eve of the war this process had not progressed all that far, and the Ottoman authorities attempted to repossess land that had already been registered as private property.[34] But with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the British occupation of Iraq, the pace of change accelerated rapidly, exaggerating social tensions, economic disparities, and political discord.[35] In the political settlements following the First World War, Britain and France carved the Middle East into spheres of influence, prearranged by the 1915 Sykes-Picot Agreement and implemented at the San Remo conference in April 1920.[36] Britain received mandates over both Iraq and Palestine. This was a transparent attempt to legalize the British occupation of Iraq, and Iraqi nationalists viewed it as "imperialism in a new guise and as colonization under a new name."[37]

Spearheaded by tribal *shaikhs* in the Middle Euphrates and by the Shiʿi leadership of Najaf, Iraqi agitation against the British mandate was initiated in the summer of 1920, just six weeks after the formal announcement of the arrangement. This agitation soon grew into a popular insurrection, and on 4 July 1920, British garrisons and offices came under attack throughout Iraq in what one historian considers the first national 'war of liberation' against British imperialism, with "a chief feature of the movement being the unprecedented cooperation between the Sunni and the Shiʿi communities."[38] Significantly, the 1920 revolution was "the first manifestation of a form of Iraqi national identity."[39] Although the British were able to suppress the insurrection, the repression encountered heavy criticism at home for its human and financial costs, utilization of chemical weapons against the rebels, and overall heavy handedness.

Subsequently, the British Colonial Office set up a sub-department for the newly acquired Middle Eastern territories, and at a conference in Cairo in March 1921, chaired by Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, new structures

[32] In "tax farming" the central authority contracted with local businessmen or headmen to collect a specific sum as tax from an area by whatever means they saw fit; tax farmers would generally collect a much larger amount than required and keep the difference for themselves.

[33] Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 186.

[34] Interviews by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl; Zakî Khairî, Baghdad (18 January 1976).

[35] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 4. During the whole period, the increase in privately registered land was still rather modest. The *miri* (state land) fell from about four-fifths in the 1860s to about 60 per cent in the 1933–1958 period, and the *topu* land rose from about 20 per cent in the 1860s to about 30 per cent on the eve of the 1958 Revolution. See Ḥasan, "The Role of Foreign Trade in Economic Development in Iraq, 1864–1964," p. 350.

[36] David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Holt, 2001).

[37] Philip W. Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 262.

[38] Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p. 33.

[39] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 10–11.

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were established for these territories. Iraq was to be ruled indirectly, nominally through a national cabinet and civil service headed by an Arab. Power would, however, continue to be held by British advisers, and Britain would have veto power over financial and military matters. In addition, Britain would administer Iraq's foreign relations.

Amîr Faiṣal, the son of Sharîf Ḥusain, leader of the Arab Revolt of 1916, was the British choice to rule Iraq as he had just been expelled by the French from his short tenure upon the throne as King of Syria and thus had only limited support among the local elites. He did, however, have some support in Iraq, especially among Iraqi officers who had served with him in the Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottomans and many of whom had been part of his short-lived administration in Syria. Other candidates, some of whom had been active in the 1920 revolution, were more popular, but they were either not trusted by or were seen as antagonistic to the British. Because of his limited local acceptance, Faiṣal was viewed by the British as dependent upon them, and therefore as amenable to British pressure. At the same time, he would further divide the leaders of the anti-British national movement since as a descendant of the prophet Muḥammad he commanded the loyalty of many Muslims. This accorded him some popular support and allowed him to transcend sectarian divisions, making an open challenge to his nomination virtually unthinkable. In the spring of 1921, the British stage-managed the election of Faiṣal as a constitutional monarch, crowning him Faiṣal I.

Under Faiṣal, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of October 1922 replaced the mandate and formalized British control for a twenty-year period. It gave Britain the right to oversee Iraq's financial and international affairs and to station armed forces on Iraqi soil; it also stipulated that "the king would heed Britain's advice on all matters affecting British interests."[40] In return, Britain agreed to provide military and civilian aid to Iraq and to support its application for membership in the League of Nations. Within two months of the public announcement of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, two major political parties – *Ḥizb al-Nahḍah al-ʿIrâqiyyah* (the Iraqi Renaissance Party), headed by Muḥammad al-Ṣadr, and *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanî* (the National Party), headed by Ja'far Abu-l-Timmân (both men were prominent Shiʿi leaders) – were formed, largely in protest against the treaty. A pro-British party – *al-Ḥizb al-Ḥurr al-ʿIrâqî* (the Liberal Party of Iraq), headed by Maḥmûd al-Naqîb – was also formed.

On 23 August 1922, spontaneous mass demonstrations protesting the treaty broke out. Because of the strong opposition, King Faiṣal and his government refused to ratify the agreement, and, on 29 August, the government resigned. In response, the British High Commission banned political parties, dissolved the parliament, and ruled directly. Through the Anglo-Iraq Treaty, which was finally ratified in January 1926, and the constitution, which had been passed by a constituent assembly in 1924, the mandate was replaced with indirect British rule. The constitution vested considerable power in the monarch (whom the British nevertheless controlled) and provided only a facade of democratic

[40] Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, p. 38.

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TABLE 1.1. *The Population of Iraq (in thousands)*

Type	1905	% of Total	1930	% of Total	1947	% of Total
Bedouin	393	17	234	7	250	5
Rural	1,324	59	2,346	68	2,703	57
Urban	533	34	808	35	1,864	38
Total	2,350		3,388		4,817	

Source: Muḥammad Salmân Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq* (Beirut: al-Mattabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1965), p. 53.

representation in parliament.[41] In response to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, Nûrî al-Saʿîd formed the *al-ʿAhd* (Allegiance Party) to offset agitation by anti-British parties, particularly from the new *al-Ikhâʾ al-Waṭanî* (National Fraternity), which was created by Yâsîn al-Hâshimî to challenge British rule and the treaty that entrenched it. Two of *al-Ikhâʾ al-Waṭanî*'s active personalities, who later became major figures in Iraqi political life, were Rashîd ʿAlî al-Gailânî and Ḥikmat Sulaimân.

Under the rule of the British authorities and the Iraqi constitutional monarchy created by the British in 1921, Iraq was recognized as an independent state in 1932. The country then began a process of rapid social transformation, the scope of which was reflected in its changing demographic composition. Between 1930 and 1947 Iraq experienced rapid population growth, primarily as a result of lower infant mortality rates (Table 1.1). The trend towards settlement of the Bedouin population, which had contributed to the substantial increase in rural population between 1905 and 1930, continued because of the rapid expansion of arable land. Between 1918 and 1943, the total cultivated area in the irrigation zone increased from 936,500 acres to 4,241,718 acres.[42]

Iraq's urban population also increased dramatically between 1930 and 1947, reflecting the economic changes that were occurring in the country. These included the development of oil production, the beginnings of industrialization, and the organization of the modern centralized bureaucratic state. Regarding the condition of labour in Iraq in the mid-1920s, a British Colonial Office report to the Council of the League of Nations observed:

> In Iraq there are hardly any organized industries worth mentioning. Local industries are mostly of the cottage variety, namely tanning, weaving, copper and iron smithing, and a few others of less importance. Families in their homes carry on these industries. There are no factories in the ordinary sense of the word and the problems associated with factory conditions do not exist.[43]

[41] Ibid., pp. 38–39.

[42] Doreen Warriner, *Land and Poverty in the Middle East* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1948), p. 99.

[43] His Britannic Majesty's Government, *Report on the Administration of Iraq for the Year 1926* (London: HMSO, 1927), p. 28.

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The British observations herein accurately captured the primitive nature of Iraq's labour conditions.

The British, having little legitimacy in the eyes of the local population and, at the same time, trying to limit their expenditures, attempted to establish an internal social basis for their continued rule by creating a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, composed mainly of high officials and military officers to whom they gave large salaries and many privileges. The British also supported the class of intermediary middlemen whose interests were closely interwoven with those of foreign companies, by either marketing their products or providing them with cheap raw material and labour.

In addition to those classes, the British strengthened the semi-feudal authorities in rural areas.[44] The Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation, enacted in 1916 and formally incorporated into the Iraqi Constitution in 1925, secured substantial judicial and tax-levying powers for the monarchy.[45] More important, perhaps, those *shaikh*s in the south and *aghas* in the north who were loyal to the British mandatory power, were generously rewarded with huge tracts of land that had previously been state property and that historically had been enjoyed by all tribal members, a practice known as Lazmah. Until 1927, *shaikh*s and *aghas* had had total immunity from property taxes,[46] and even later, their tax burden remained relatively light. The Lazmah custom (land tenure law), and the Settlement of Land Rights Law of 1932, provided justification for land-grabbing by tribal chiefs and other members of the emerging landowner class, such as high government officials and rich town merchants, as well as giving them legal title to the land they seized. These laws allowed the new landowners to deprive the peasants of their communal land rights and, concurrently, their means of living.

As a result, enormous private estates were created, and land ownership became concentrated in a few hands. By 1952 over half a million acres of former state land in the province of Kut were owned by only two families, and in the province of ʿAmara, eight families held 53 per cent of all the land.[47] Iraq resembled a patchwork quilt, as forty-nine families held some 1,145,000 acres.[48] In 1958, in the country as a whole, 2,480 landowners, or one per cent of the population, held 55 per cent of all agricultural lands, whereas about six hundred thousand peasant families were completely landless, and 64 per cent of the rural population owned only 3.6 per cent of all cultivated land.[49] Although this period witnessed extensive growth in agricultural production, increasing numbers of peasants were now forced by poverty to leave their villages and

44 Zakî Khairî and Suʿâd Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, vol. 1 (n.p., 1984), pp. 18–19.

45 Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 30.

46 Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 98.

47 Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 32.

48 Ibid., p. 56.

49 Yousif Sayigh, *The Economies of the Arab World: Development Since 1945* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 28.

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migrate to overcrowded *Ṣarîfas* (shanty towns) on the outskirts of Iraq's major cities, particularly Baghdad and Basra. By 1958, "no fewer than 32 million *dunums* of land were in private hands,[50] and . . . of the area ploughed in that year less than one-fourth was in cultivation before the First World War, and a far smaller proportion privately owned."[51]

Nevertheless, productivity declined from 225 kilos per *dunum* during the 1920s to 187 kilos in the 1930s, and even further, to 143 kilos, prior to 1958. The standard of living for the majority of the population declined dramatically. In addition to the appalling conditions in which the peasants now lived as a result of their mass migration to the towns and the worldwide economic crisis of the early 1930s,[52] the situation of the majority of the urban population also deteriorated sharply.[53] Despite the inflation of the 1930s, the daily wage of unskilled labour declined steeply, from 75 fils in 1926 to 56 fils in 1930,[54] and to 50 fils annually from 1935 to 1937.[55] This trend continued through the 1940s and into the 1950s; in 1953 a report prepared by the International Labour Office expressed the opinion that "taking into account the cost of living, numbers of wage earners must be living at or near subsistence if not below."[56] In the meantime, the size of the national bourgeoisie was slowly growing. Iraq's industry was likewise in an embryonic state; the first law to protect national industry was enacted in 1929, it provided tax exemption only to mechanized industry using Iraqi raw materials and whose products were needed by the country.[57]

Although some merchants and financiers made large fortunes [at that time,] the salaried but small middle class made up of civil servants, teachers, clerks in commercial houses, and writers and journalists was excluded from political power and its members found themselves in a very precarious and unstable economic situation.[58] Although their numbers grew with the development of the public school system and availability of government scholarships,[59] their economic distress made them increasingly attracted to anti-establishment ideologies in the period between the two world wars.

The end of the 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War opened a new chapter in the history of pre-revolutionary Iraqi society. Several different and yet interrelated factors contributed to the socio-economic transformation

[50] One *dunum* is roughly equal to 0.25 acres.
[51] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 110.
[52] Ibid., pp. 139–147.
[53] Ibid., pp. 136–139.
[54] One *fils* equals three-tenths of a cent U.S.
[55] Batau, *Old Social Classes*, p. 137.
[56] Ibid., pp. 137–138.
[57] Khaîrî and Khaîrî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 19.
[58] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 473.
[59] For relevant data on the development of schools and intelligentsia in Iraq during that period, see *Muʿjam-al-ʿIrâq*, vol. 1 (Baghdad: al Najâḥ Press, 1953), pp. 166, 267; See also Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 34–35.

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and had a major impact on the development of the Iraqi political environment. First, and probably most decisively, was the war itself, which returned allied armies of occupation and a great number of foreigners to Iraq. The British war effort stimulated both local industry and oil extraction. Under wartime conditions, and with the need for import substitution, local firms found an obvious incentive to expand production or to initiate new ventures. The boom continued in the early post-war period, and by 1957, fixed investment in industrial capital had already eclipsed commercial capital (ID 27.25 millon versus ID 20.80 million).[60] As a result of the accelerated rate of capital accumulation from economic growth in the 1940s and 1950s, by 1958, of the seventeen Baghdad families listed for that year as worth one million or more dinars, only one, the Lâwî family, "had two decades earlier ranked as 'first class' members whose 'financial consideration' (in the Chamber of Commerce) ranged between 22,500 and 75,000 *dinars*."[61] The urban working class – those Iraqis employed in industry, transport, communications, and services – also increased and by 1958 numbered 442,000 persons, which represented about 20 per cent of the country's 2.6 million urban residents.[62] Because of this economic development, Iraqi society was divided between a rich and powerful petite bourgeoisie, in which "23 families held, on a conservative estimate, 30 to 35 million dinars in assets of all sorts . . . an amount equalling, in rough terms, 56 to 65 per cent of the entire private corporate, commercial and industrial capital [of the country]," [63] and a large and still growing mass of dispossessed labourers, who had no access to political power and were barely able to eke out an existence. Nevertheless, such socio-economic cleavages had not yet created a marked popular polarization.

According to Hanna Batatu, "Common pauperism had not, by 1958, created any enduring common feeling between the *Ṣarîfa* dwellers and the city workers."[64] However, the poverty and new social challenges could not remain without any reaction. Workers' unions, strikes, and other forms of political mobilization emerged and started to have an impact on the political situation in the country. As early as July 1931 the first labour union in Iraq, *Jamᶜiyyat Aṣḥâb al-Ṣanâiᶜ* (the Artisans' Association), led by Muḥammad Ṣâliḥ al-Qazzâz, organized a massive strike in Baghdad, which soon spread to the provincial towns and took on a political dimension.[65] Despite the authorities' subsequent closure of this union, similar outbreaks of popular discontent were repeated in the 1930s and early 1940s, and at the end of the Second World War, at the

[60] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 35.
[61] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 274.
[62] Ḥasan, "The Role of Foreign Trade in Economic Development in Iraq, 1864–1964," pp. 363–364.
[63] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 274.
[64] Ibid., p. 136.
[65] Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, "Labour and National Liberation: The Trade Union Movement in Iraq, 1920–1958," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 1983), pp. 148–149.

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time of the British and American alliance with the Soviet Union, when domestic repression was consequently more relaxed, Iraqi authorities granted permission for the establishment of sixteen new labour unions. Members of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) quickly took over, the leadership of twelve of these unions, and all of them came to play an important role in the social and political events of the late 1940s and early 1950s.[66] As was typical for Iraq, the largely class-determined socio-economic struggle and the national political struggle were frequently interwoven. Thus during the great upheaval of *al-Wathbah* (the Leap) of 1948, the masses protested against both increased food prices and the abortive Portsmouth Agreement with Britain, which was perceived to be similar to the hated Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930.[67] In this protest the population was also turning against the government and the state apparatus that it controlled, which were ready to accept and enforce both the economic conditions that the majority found unacceptable and the humiliating treaty.

From its inception in 1921 until the 1958 revolution, the Iraqi state apparatus remained largely, if not completely, alienated from its own population, and there was often no close correlation even between the new upper classes and the nation's rulers. As Batatu notes, "The crucial political decisions were made by non-Iraqis, or outside the country's frontiers . . . and there was often no close correspondence between the local distribution of wealth and local distribution of power."[68] In addition, as a result of the influx of revenue from the oil companies "the state became, in large measure, economically autonomous from society,"[69] and this dislocation heightened its potential for despotism. At the same time, however, the state became even more connected to, and dependent on, external financial and political powers, and was increasingly ready to serve their interests.[70] As economic growth was not associated with any meaningful social or democratic progress, legal channels for the expression of discontent and calls for social reforms were barred. There was a huge political void beneath the Iraqi state structures and, below this, a vast undercurrent of popular dissatisfaction with, and a questioning of, a socio-economic and political system that was failing to meet the needs of the majority of the population. No formulated ideology or organization, however, yet existed through which this dissatisfaction could be expressed. Nevertheless, the potential for a truly revolutionary situation existed and provided many opportunities for radical movements.This inchoate situation ultimately, and perhaps inevitably, culminated in the dramatic violence of a military coup in July 1958.

[66] Farouk Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 38–39.
[67] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, "Labour and National Liberation," pp. 153–154.
[68] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 274–275.
[69] Ibid, pp. 283 and 353. See also Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 35.
[70] According to Suᶜâd Khairî, brutal repression of the Kirkuk oilfield workers in 1946 proved to many Iraqis that the government was perfectly prepared to oppress them in defence of British economic interests. *Min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Thawriyyah al-Muᶜâṣirah fî al-ᶜIrâq, 1920–1958*, vol 1.1 (Baghdad: Maṭbaᶜit al-Adîb al-ᶜArabî, 1974), pp. 150–152.

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Radical movements had a significant impact on Iraqi socity even before the coup. One direct result of the activities of al-Raḥḥâl and his associates was the creation, in mid-1926, of the *Nâdî al-Taḍâmun* (Solidarity Club); its basic declared aims were the unity of youth, the propagation of knowledge, the progress of national industry, and the fulfillment of all "principles leading to the improvement of the life of the society."[71] Many young people who joined the club, such as ᶜAzîz Sharîf, ᶜÂṣim Flayyiḥ, Ḥusain Jamîl, Zakî Khairî and Jamîl Tûmâ, later became leading leftists and communists.[72] In April 1926, to counteract this tendency, the Iraqi government joined in a regional agreement, sponsored by Britain, to combat communism,[73] and as a result, political activism became more difficult. Nevertheless, the *Nâdî al-Taḍâmun* expanded its activities, and on 1 January 1927 it organized its first public demonstration, calling for freedom of the press. In response, the government closed the main high school in Baghdad for ten days, and a number of students and teachers were arrested or expelled, later to be released and reinstated as a result of pressure from a number of public protests. On 8 February 1928, the club again organized a mass demonstration, this time to protest against the visit to Baghdad of the well-known British Zionist Sir Alfred Mond; the demonstration, in which over twenty thousand people took part, ended in a violent scuffle with the police.[74]

The significance of these demonstrations transcended the specific events; in effect, they signalled the birth of mass politics and mass political mobilization in Iraq. Furthermore, they heralded the issues (British imperialism and Zionism) and the processes (oppression and human rights abuses) that would come to dominate modern Iraqi politics. Until this point, politics and government had been the monopoly of the elite, and the masses had had little input and, perhaps more significantly, did not expect to have any input. Though both *Ḥizb al-Nahḍah al-ᶜIrâqiyyah* and *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanî* had spearheaded the 1922 demonstrations, they had not organized them, and despite the wide popular support they enjoyed, their legitimacy derived from the institutional underpinnings of elite politics rather than from the democratic foundations of mass politics. Indeed, the political process they engaged in was unabashedly elitist, and not participatory.

Al-Raḥḥâl and the First Challenge

In the context of this volatile political environment, Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl began translating and disseminating the works of European socialists for a circle of young Iraqi intellectuals, gathering around himself a number of young

[71] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ᶜî al-ᶜIrâqî*, p. 29.

[72] Ibid.

[73] ᶜAbd-ul Razzâq al-Ḥasanî, *Târîkh al-Wizârât al-ᶜIrâqiyyah*, vol. 2, 7th ed. (Baghdad: Afâq ᶜArabiyyah, 1988), p. 59.

[74] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ᶜî al-ᶜIrâqî*, p. 30; see also, Khairî al-ᶜUmarî, *Ḥikâyât Siyâsiyyah min Târîkh al-ᶜIrâq al-Ḥadîth* (Cairo: Dâr al-Hilâl, 1969), pp. 173–194.

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nationalists and socially concerned students such as Muḥammad Salîm Fattâḥ, Muṣṭafâ ʿAlî, ʿAbd-ul-lah Jaddûʿ, ʿAwnî Bakr Ṣidqî, and Maḥmûd Aḥmad al-Saiyyid. Saiyyid (1903–1937), the most prominent among these intellectuals, was pioneer Iraqi realist short story writer. In a 1923 letter to the well-known Egyptian socialist Nicola Ḥaddâd, al-Saiyyid described a major obstacle to the dissemination of socialist thought among the young Iraqi intelligentsia:

In our isolation from the intellectual heritage of the civilized world, our only contact is "Reuters" news wires. . . . The extent of our understanding of socialism does not go beyond your book. . . . The socialists in France sent us only French publications, which only Iraqis with a knowledge of French can read. [The Iraqi majority] is still thirsty for reading more about socialism in our own language. Did you ever think of writing or translating to Arabic books on contemporary socialism that deal with socialist systems, administration, governance, and historical background?[75]

In 1929, al-Raḥḥâl, with al-Saiyyid's cooperation, established the bi-monthly *Al-Ṣaḥîfah* (The Journal), which became the realization of al-Raḥḥâl's efforts to introduce scientific socialist thought into the intellectual circles of Iraq. As al-Raḥḥâl later stated:

After the initial five years of thinking out loud in Baghdad's coffee shops, discussing and learning through the translation of foreign socialist journals and magazines – as I spoke English, French, German, and Turkish and thus had more access to socialist thought – I gathered around me a number of eager, thirsty young critical minds looking for answers to their country's problems. I felt like Aristotle, and these were my disciples. Our circles became wider, so we decided on 28 December 1924 to start the journal in order to publish mature analyses of a scientific socialist approach.[76]

As described by al-Saiyyid, the journal's aim was to "disseminat[e] the ideas of revolution and Marxism."[77] Al-Saiyyid was in touch with many Arab socialists, such as Yûsuf Ibrâhîm Yazbak in Lebanon and Shiblî Shumaiyyil and Nicola Ḥaddâd in Egypt, and he soon developed a strong following through his own writings. In a personal letter to Yazbak, dated 19 April 1929, al-Saiyyid, who served as director of correspondence for the Baghdad municipality, described the journal as

dedicated . . . to the spread of revolutionary thought and Marxism. . . . In Baghdad these days there is a labour movement [1929] as workers have petitioned the Ministry of the Interior, to form a union in the footsteps of the Barbers' Union and other [nascent] labour organizations. . . . There is no foundation to the recent scurrilous article in the *Shûrâ* newspaper attributed to their correspondents in Baghdad, the gist of which suggested that these movements have the smell of Bolshevism. I believe these people want nothing more than to discourage our workers. I also enclose, herewith, the appeal I issued to

[75] Quoted in ʿAzîz Sibâhî, '*Uqûd min Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Thaqâfah al-Jadîdah Publications, 2002), p. 19.

[76] Interview by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl, Baghdad (18 October 1973).

[77] Personal letter from al-Saiyyid to Yûsuf Ibrâhîm Yazbak (19 April 1929). Copy of letter supplied to author by Professor Majid Khadduri.

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workers in the capital [Baghdad]. The tone of this call is the most you can aspire to in the world of journalism here.[78]

Al-Raḥḥâl continued:

In 1922, we tried to form the first socialist circle. It had no name and our group was basically for intellectual debate. We held Marxist meetings in a mosque maintained by al-Saiyyid's father. We were basically personal friends, and we produced one serious report on the social, political, and economic conditions of Iraq in 1923. To impress Lenin we translated it into Russian and had it delivered to the Russian Embassy in Tehran to send to him. The embassy later advised us to join the Iraqi Nationalist Party, though we did not do this. Thus, when we established *al-Ṣaḥîfah* with its title in red, we hoped it would become the intellectual socialist articulator of all revolutionaries [in Iraq].[79]

The articles in *Al-Ṣaḥîfah* were very radical and focused on three main issues. First, they openly approached sensitive social subjects related to social justice and human rights against state and class-based oppression. Within this context, they emphasized women's rights, describing the current situation as

the remnants of the feudal ages; the *Ḥarîm* and the *Ḥijâb* [veil] continue the features of the feudal system. The aristocracy of that period was able, through the exploitation of the work of the *fallâḥ* [peasants], to build the *Ḥarîm* system to keep women captive. The *Ḥarîm* and *Ḥijâb* were up to that time unknown [in Iraq] and will wither away once again when the people's classes establish their state.[80]

This call for women's rights produced a public outcry from Iraq's conservative elements and religious leadership. Second, *Al-Ṣaḥîfah* called for the creation of a regime that championed social justice and defended the underprivileged classes. It propagated the theoretical principles of socialism and Marxism, which made the paper an intellectual centre for progressive elements of the society and channelled them toward socialism. Third, the journal called for more public participation in politics and took a staunchly anti-British attitude. Largely because of government reaction to this third focus, *Al-Ṣaḥîfah* was able to publish only six issues before it was suspended by the authorities.[81]

In 1925, al-Raḥḥâl established another journal, *Sînamâ al-Ḥayât* (Theatre of Life), which published its first weekly issue on 17 December 1926. An editorial in this issue described the journal as a forum for "popular socialism from the people to the people."[82] In 1928 publication of this journal also ended, not because of government pressure, but as the result of a split that occurred between al-Raḥḥâl and al-Saiyyid. Both men subsequently entered the Iraqi civil service and, in effect, ceased their activist efforts. However, leftist groups of the 1930s, particularly the *Ahâlî* group, organized in 1932, and the communist

78 Ibid.
79 Interview by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl, Baghdad (18 October 1973).
80 Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 29.
81 Ibid.
82 Râfaʿîl Buṭṭî, *Al-Ṣaḥâfah fî al-ʿIrâq* (Cairo: Institute of Higher Arab Studies, 1955), p. 124.

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group *Lajnat Mukâfaḥat al-Istiʿmâr wa al-Istithmâr*, organized in 1934, emerged from among al-Raḥḥâl's disciples. These followers included Yûsuf and ʿAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâʿîl al-Bustânî (al-Saiyyid's cousins), Zakî Khairî, ʿÂṣim Flayyiḥ, ʿAbd-ul-lah Jaddûʿ, Faḍîl Muḥammad, Muṣṭafâ ʿAlî, ʿAwnî Bakr Ṣidqî (al-Raḥḥâl's brother-in-law), Salîm Fattâḥ, Muḥammad Ṣâliḥ al-Qazzâz, Ḥusain Jamîl, and Rashîd Muṭlaq, all of whom subsequently became prominent members of the communist movement.

Early Communist Organization

Whereas al-Raḥḥâl's efforts to introduce Marxist thought into Iraq in the early 1920s were successful, the origins of Iraq's communist organizations are less clear. As early as January 1925, a pro-British newspaper warned that communism was spreading in Iraq and warned the government and religious leadership to be wary of it.[83] There are several versions of how communism developed, reflecting both the diversity and the interconnectedness of influences operating on leftist political mobilization in this period. Some historians contend that in 1929 the chairman of the Palestine Communist Party, Haim Auerbach (alias ʿAbbûd), corresponded with a young Iraqi political activist, Yûsuf Salmân Yûsuf (alias Fahd) (1901–1949), leading to the creation of the *al-Nasiriyah* Marxist circle.[84] Shortly thereafter, Yûsuf Salmân Yûsuf, Ḥamîd Majîd (from Nasiriyah), Sâmî Nâdir, and Dhâfir Ṣâliḥ (from Basra) formed the short-lived *Jamʿiyyat al-Aḥrâr al-lâ-Dîniyyah* (Secular Liberal Society) according to Marxist principles. The group kept in touch with ʿAbbûd, who sent them the Beirut periodical *Al-Shams*.

Another version suggests that the Comintern agent Buṭrus Abu Nâṣir (also known as Pyotr Vasili, or Petros), posing as a tailor, arrived in Nasiriyah in 1929 and converted Yûsuf Salmân Yûsuf to Marxism.[85] He enabled Yûsuf to travel to Moscow in 1935 to study Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism in the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV). Returning home in 1938 to lead the Iraqi Communist Party, Yûsuf adopted the pseudonym "Fahd," and Petros, his mission accomplished, returned to Moscow. Yet another version of the story asserts that Iraqi Marxists tried to establish a communist organization in the 1920s, even before the creation of trade unions. The pioneers were Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl, ʿAwnî Bakr Ṣidqî, Maḥmûd Aḥmad al-Saiyyid, ʿAbd-ul-lah Jaddûʿ, Muṣṭafâ ʿAlî, and Fâḍil Muḥammad. This account also acknowledges Fahd's adoption of Marxism in Nasiriyah in 1929.[86] In a further version, an

[83] *Al-ʿÂlam al-ʿArabî*, no. 243 (Baghdad, 7 January 1925).

[84] ʿAbd-ul-lah Amîn, *Al-Shiyûʿiyyah ʿAlâ al-Ṣufûd* (Baghdad: Shafiq Press, 1974), p. 81; and ʿAbd-ul-Jabbâr al-Jubûrî, *Al-Aḥzâb wa al-jam ʿiyyât al-Siyâsiyyah fî al-Quṭr al-ʿIrâqî, 1908–1958* (Baghdad: Dâr al-Ḥuriyyah, 1977), pp. 108–109.

[85] Qadrî Qalʿajî, *Tajrubat ʿArabî fî al-Ḥizb al-shiyû ʿî* (Beirut: Dar al-Kâtib al-ʿArabî, 1959), p. 23.

[86] Suʿâd Khairî, *Min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Thawriyyah al-Muʿâṣirah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 55.

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active communist circle, led by Mullah Sharîf ʿUthmân, known locally as the "Red Mullah," was established in Irbil in the early 1930s, and this group amalgamated with Fahd's to form the Communist Party of Iraq.[87] An even more detailed version credits Fahd with spreading Marxism-Leninism in 1932, and even with propagating those ideas under the name of the Communist Party of Iraq, issuing pronouncements titled "Workers and Peasants of the Arab World Unite."[88] Fahd was arrested in 1933; during his trial, he admitted that he was a communist, making him the first person to accept the communist label and defend communism in such a public forum.[89]

Whatever the truth of the origins of communism in Iraq, a meeting of Iraqi communists held on 31 March 1934 was of primary significance in the development of the country's Communist Party. Those present agreed to organize *Lajnat Mukâfaḥat al-Istiʿmâr wa al-Istithmâr* (the Committee for Combating Imperialism and Exploitation), to be led by ʿÂṣim Flayyiḥ. Other notable participants were ʿAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâʿîl al-Bustânî, Yûnân Frankûl, Zakî Khairî, ʿAbd-ul-Wahâb Maḥmûd, Mûsâ Ḥabîb, Mahdî Hâshim, Wadîʿ Ṭalyah, Yûsuf Mattî, Nûrî Rufâʿîl (Baghdad), Fahd and Ḥamîd Majîd (Nasiriyah), and Sâmî Nâdir and Dhâfir Ṣâliḥ (Basra). The committee called for the annulment of all debts and mortgages; national control of oil plants, railways, and banks; the protection of motherhood; and the dictatorship of workers and peasants. According to ʿÂṣim Flayyiḥ:

> This committee was the first formal organization of any communist group in Iraq. Previous groups were basically pseudo-intellectual exercises that did not include in their ranks any workers or peasants. We created a formal national organization that included workers (although there were no peasants). My selection as the secretary was based solely on the fact that I was an artisan, the closest of the group to being a worker. The intention in organizing the committee was to begin serious communist action in the country. We selected as members, action-oriented people. Thus, I was the first general secretary of the Communist Party of Iraq and our committee was the first Central Committee.[90]

At the end of 1935 the committee decided to adopt as its name the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), and to collaborate with the *al-Ahâlî* group, progressive liberal intellectuals who agitated for social reform, cultural emancipation, and national liberation. The group was also committed to reform through raising public awareness, and as its primary activity published a daily paper in Baghdad, *Al-Ahâlî*; the first issue appeared on 2 January 1932. Most of Iraq's progressive activists started with the *al-Ahâlî* group, which remained a public

[87] Sâmî Shûrsh, "Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Yasâr al-Kurdî (al-ʿIrâqî)," *Abwâb*, no. 8 (London, 1996), p. 73.

[88] ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Ḥasan al-Jârâllah, *Taṣaddu*ʿ *al-Bashariyyah min Khilâl Wailât al-Istibdâd wa al-*ʿ*Ubûdiyyah* (Saidon, Lebanon: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1969), pp. 77–80.

[89] Suʿâd Khairî, "Short Study of the Iraqi Revolutionary Movement, Pt. 2," *Al-Thaqâfa al-Jadîdah* (October 1972), p. 32.

[90] Interview by author with ʿÂṣim Flayyiḥ, Baghdad (18 February 1959).

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social conscience for several decades.[91] Notable affiliates and alumni of *al-Ahâlî* include ʿAbd-ul-Fattâḥ Ibrâhîm, Kâmil al-Châdirchî, Ḥusain Jamîl, ʿAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâʿîl al-Bustânî, Yûsuf Ismâʿîl al-Bustânî, and Muḥammad Ḥadîd.

Al-Ahâlî's ideas were initially rather vague and incoherent. In an editorial in its paper's first issue, under the title "Interests of the People Above All Other Interests," the group declared that it aimed to work for the benefit of the majority of the country's inhabitants by raising their standard of living. It wanted to create "a sound political and economic order and make the best use of the country's intellectual talents and material resources." As its ideology became more explicit, the group identified itself with a reformist and liberal democratic version of socialism called *al-Shaʿbiyyah* (populism), whose meaning was explained best in one of the group's leaflets, *Muṭâlaʿât fî al-Shaʿbiyyah* (Studies in Populism).[92] The group understood the word "people" to mean the majority of people – not one special class among them[93] – and it called for a government that would be able to combine its authority with the preservation of the rights of the population.[94] Consequently, the rights of individuals had to be protected by an independent judicial system,[95] and the government's primary duties would be to serve the majority, to ensure security, to supervise certain economic matters,[96] and to see to the abolition of economic disparities and inequalities.[97]

The *Ahâlî* group insisted, however, that they differed from the communists since (1) they did not believe in the decisive role of class conflict and the special leading role of the working class; (2) they were not against family and religion;[98] (3) they emphasized anti-imperialism but did not subscribe to the communist concept of social and political revolution;[99] (4) they cautioned against nationalist chauvinism while espousing patriotism;[100] and (5) they perceived a need for cooperation to create a progressive Arab society based on the principles of *al-Shaʿbiyyah*. Reflecting the group's reformist tone, they began discussions in the summer of 1935 about transforming *al-Shaʿbiyyah* into a formal party; ʿAbd-ul-Fattâḥ Ibrâhîm rejected this direction, preferring the movement to remain underground.[101]

A rift emerged between the two groups, with the communists characterizing *al-Ahâlî*'s ideas as naïve and not much more radical than various official

[91] For a history of *al-Ahâlî* group, see Fûʾâd Ḥusain al-Wakîl, *Jamâʿât al-Ahâlî fî al-ʿIrâq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture, Rashid Publishing House, 1979).
[92] *Muṭâlaʿât fî al-Shaʿbiyyah* [Studies in Populism] (Baghdad: Ahali Press, 1935).
[93] Ibid., p. 7
[94] Ibid., p. 10.
[95] Ibid., p. 12.
[96] Ibid., p. 13.
[97] Ibid., p. 23.
[98] Ibid., p. 35.
[99] Ibid., pp. 35–36.
[100] Ibid., p. 45.
[101] Muḥammad Ḥadîd, *Mudhakkarâtî: Al-Ṣirâʿ min ajl al-Dîmûqrâtiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq* (London: Dar al-Saqi, 2000), pp. 144–149.

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governmental reform programmes. In particular, they attacked its understanding of the concept of socialism, and one communist, Qâsim Ḥasan, dedicated thirty-one pages of his seventy-nine-page pamphlet, *Fî al-Maizân: Ḥawla Risâlat al-Ahâlî; Muṭâlaᶜât fî al-Shaᶜbiyyah* (On the balance: On the message of *al-Ahâlî*; studies on *al-Shaᶜbiyyah*) *al-Shaᶜbiyyah* to this single issue. On the other hand, a number of leading communists cooperated with and penetrated the *Ahâlî* group, including ᶜAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâᶜîl al-Bustânî, who served as the editor in chief of the *Ahâlî* newspaper; Yûsuf Ismâᶜîl al-Bustânî, his brother, also one of the *Ahâlî* editors; ᶜAbd-ul-lah Jaddûᶜ; Yûsuf Mattî; ᶜAwnî Bakr Ṣidqî; and even the future leader of the party, Fahd himself, who was the correspondent for the *Ahâlî* paper in Nasiriyah city.[102]

On 19 July 1935, the ICP started to publish the first clandestine Iraqi paper, *Kifâḥ al-Shaᶜb* (The Struggle of the People), which carried the Marxist slogan "Workers of the World Unite," as well as the communist insignia of the hammer and sickle, on its masthead. The paper was dedicated to a rather simplistic dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology. For example, in its second issue, in August 1935, it expressed faith in the leadership of the Comintern, stating that the Comintern's forthcoming Seventh Congress would "set for us rules and plans to guide us in challenging our enemies." It also warned its sympathizers to avoid unnecessary conflict and polemics on side issues such as Islamic beliefs, social customs regarding women, and other sensitive subjects. As it argued:

> There is a mistake committed by some of our comrades in the propagation of their ideas which results in arguments and conflicts. . . . they focused on the issues of religion, the situation of women, and the Islamic family or the family in general. Comrades, although we believe that all those issues are very important and we appreciate their impact on the march of the socialist revolution, . . . we nevertheless have a programme which we have to follow and we must remember which goals are of primary importance.

Partly because of the lack of any other progressive media, *Kifâḥ al-Shaᶜb* achieved some popularity and had a circulation of over five hundred copies. However, it stopped publication after the fifth issue, in November 1935, since the Party was dismantled following a police crackdown,[103] and most of its active members abandoned their political activities. The Party's secretary-general, ᶜÂṣim Flayyiḥ, gave the authorities a written guarantee that he would stop his political activity, and he then devoted all his time to improving his tailoring business. ᶜAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâᶜîl al-Bustânî and his brother Yûsuf departed to Syria, where ᶜAbd-ul-Qâdir joined the Syrian Communist Party. Yûsuf continued on from Syria to France, where he joined the French Communist Party. Mûsâ Ḥabîb became a contractor; during the 1950s he was editorial secretary of the Baghdad-based newspaper *Al-Bilâd* (The Country). Yûnân Frankûl also became a successful contractor.

[102] Al-Wakîl, *Jamâᶜât al-Ahâlî fî al-ᶜIrâq*, pp. 186–187.
[103] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ᶜî al-ᶜIrâqî*, pp. 38–39.

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The Party had apparently disintegrated, but its renewal and revitalization were imminent. Some communist cells had broken away earlier from the main body of the Party and survived the crackdown. Others quickly reestablished themselves, especially after the Arab world's first military coup, on 29 October 1936, which was led by the Iraqi military's chief of staff, General Bakr Ṣidqî, a former member of *al-Shaʿbiyyah*.[104] Some leading communists, such as Mahdî Hâshim and Zakî Khairî, were released from prison, at least temporarily. In addition, many communists, acting as individuals, had never stopped their political activities and took an active part in the preparation for and execution of the coup. For that purpose, they cooperated closely with the *al-Ahâlî* group, whose members held half the portfolios of the post-coup government of Ḥikmat Sulaimân. As Muḥammad Ḥadîd's memoirs reveal, the *Ahâlî* group was a crucial actor in the Ṣidqî coup. More than mere sympathizers, *al-Ahâlî*, having written the cadre's basic programme and chosen the regime's cabinet, acted as a brain trust for the coup leaders.[105]

The Importance of *al-Ahâlî*

On 1 November 1936, Iraq's leftist groups, including the communists, and their sympathizers issued a statement calling for a public demonstration in support of seven demands: (1) eradicating the tyranny of the past; (2) strengthening the army; (3) offering an amnesty for all political prisoners; (4) allowing trade unions and newspapers to resume their activities; (5) reducing poverty and unemployment, and encouraging national industry; (6) fostering equality among the Iraqi people and spreading education throughout the country; and (7) furthering efforts towards the unity of all Arab progressive forces. On 3 November, the communists led the public demonstrations, and over fifty thousand people gathered in Baghdad to support the post-coup government.[106] The same month, the communists gave wholehearted support to an *al-Ahâlî* initiative when the *Jamʿiyyat al-Iṣlâḥ al-Shaʿbî* (Association of the People's Reform) called for "democratic freedoms," the encouragement of workers' organizations, a minimum wage, an eight-hour working day, and progressive taxation.[107] Iraqi conservatives soon branded the members of the *al-Ahâlî* group as "communists," a charge from which the ICP benefited immensely, since politically unsophisticated Iraqis soon equated the ICP with the only other group in Iraq actively seeking to bring about social and political change.

In the following month, the rift between the relatively progressive civilian ministers and the country's military leadership widened, resulting in a

[104] Ḥadîd, *Mudhakkarâtî*, p. 143.
[105] Ibid., pp. 151–165.
[106] Al-Ḥasanî, *Târîkh al-Wizârât al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, p. 238; and Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, pp. 44–45.
[107] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 48.

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crackdown by the new regime on all leftist groups and organizations, including *al-Ahâlî* and the communists.[108] General Ṣidqî, although having no formal role within the government, worked to control the regime from the outside; consequently, the differences between the military regime and its civilian supporters became irreconcilable.[109]

The *Ahâlî* members had to resign from their ministerial posts on 6 June 1937, and the Association of the People's Reform was banned in July, because, as the Interior Ministry claimed, "it was proven to be detrimental to the existence of the Kingdom and the security of the people, and because of its propagation of the poisonous communist thought."[110] With the assassination of Bakr Ṣidqî, a conservative civilian rule returned to power on 17 August 1937 bringing with it the old guard, including Jamîl al-Madfaʿî, the pro-British former prime minister. The old guard and Madfaʿî, who considered the communists to be responsible for the 1936 coup and its aftermath, arrested the leaders of the ICP, sentencing them to jail and exile, and even revoking the citizenship of some of them.[111]

The first communist cells in the Iraqi army were organized in Kirkuk and Baghdad in 1935. Two years later, sixty-five non-commissioned officers were arrested, three of whom were condemned to death before having their sentences stayed, while heavy prison sentences were imposed on the rest. Zakî Khairî, the Party liaison with the army, was given two years in jail and two years of probation. Despite this crackdown, one hundred officers maintained their membership in the Iraqi Communist Party, prompting the government to adjust the Iraqi penal code by adding Article 89a, imposing the death sentence on anyone propagating communist ideas within the army.[112]

The Party in the 1940s

The years between 1939 and 1941, during which Iraqi nationalists and pro-British elites constantly clashed, represented one of the most complicated periods in Iraqi history. The Bakr Ṣidqî coup of 1936 initiated military involvement in Iraq's politics and could be considered a historic victory for the forces of nationalism, despite the fact that the Ṣidqî regime lasted for less than a year. After its collapse, there was a gradual return to the conservative pro-British elements, culminating in March 1939 in Nûrî al-Saʿîd's formation of a government with the proclaimed goal of restoring "order." Within days of the formation of this government, the young nationalist King Ghâzî I died in a car accident,

[108] Suʿâd Khaîrî, *Min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Thawriyyah al-Muʿâṣirah fî al-ʿIrâq*, pp. 150–152.
[109] Ḥadîd, *Mudhakkarâtî*, pp. 166–170.
[110] Al-Ḥasanî, *Târîkh al-Wizârât al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, see also Suʿâd Khaîrî, *Min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Thawriyyah al-Muʿâṣirah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 70.
[111] ʿAbd-ul Razzâq al-Ḥasanî, *Târîkh al-ʿIrâq al-Siyâsî*, vol. 3 (Saidon, Lebanon: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1958), p. 178.
[112] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyû ʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, pp. 39, 40.

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and with the outbreak of the Second World War, tension between nationalist and pro-British forces erupted again, as the Nûrî al-Saʿîd government – per its treaty obligations – declared war on Germany. In the meantime, the increasing politicization of the army produced a number of movements among nationalistic young officers. This forced the pro-British Regent to appoint an anti-British prime minister, Rashîd ʿAlî al-Gailânî, whose "National Defence Government" moved closer to the Axis and declared Iraq to be neutral. Within days, conflict broke out between Gailânî and the Regent, who fled with the pro-British leadership to the British garrison in Basra. Within a month, however, British forces had removed al-Gailânî and once again occupied Iraq, placing it under direct military control and thereby turning the country into a British colony in all but name, regardless of its legal sovereignty.

The influence of the ICP during the 1930s and 1940s was limited by the local context, namely, the lack of a substantial and organized working class. Trade unionism began in 1928 but only in a few occupations, and because of the movement's political ramifications unions were prohibited by the government between 1931 and 1944. By 1938 the propagation of communist ideas had also been made a crime,[113] though the Communist Party of Iraq did enjoy some successes. Following the downfall in May 1941 of the short-lived nationalist regime of Rashîd ʿAlî al-Gailânî (which the Communist Party of Iraq had initially backed, following the Soviet line), and the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, the Iraqi communists supported the Allied war effort against fascism. In exchange for this support, the suppression of communist activities in Iraq was relaxed. With the removal of heavy-handed government tactics, the nascent Iraqi trade union movement stepped up its organizational efforts in the mid-1940s, and the communists became influential among dock workers at the Basra port, tobacco workers in Baghdad, oil field workers in Kirkuk, and railway employees across the country. Even so, the "working class" was still numerically small and was concentrated primarily within British-controlled industries and transportation. In addition, the ICP was unable to rouse the peasantry, who failed to understand either the Party's ideology or its approach to land reform.[114]

On 30 January 1938, Fahd returned from Moscow, where he had been undergoing further education and training. He opened a private commercial translating business as a front and started to organize the Party again from scratch. He contacted Marxist and leftist sympathizers but avoided the old communist groups that had been deeply penetrated by the police or were known to the government's security agencies. Initially, he constructed the Party out of unreliable and volatile material – mostly students, teachers, and government employees, predominantly from well-to-do families. The same types were also

[113] Article 89a of the Penal Code. See M. S. Agwani, *Communism in the Arab East* (Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House, 1969), p. 34.

[114] For a detailed breakdown of known ICP membership in the 1940s by occupation, ethnicity, gender, and age, see Batatu, *Old Social Classes*.

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drawn to fascist groups, and their Party loyalty was shallow. Therefore it is not surprising that the Party exhibited ideological confusion and a tendency towards fragmentation; a number of splits soon occurred.

In December 1940, the Party began to publishing its new organ, *Al-Sharârah* (The Spark), which was modelled on Lenin's publication of the same name. Its initial circulation was only ninety copies, but in 1942, after the Party acquired its own printing press, circulation increased to two thousand copies.[115] Initially, the communists supported the Gailânî revolt of April–May 1941 because it was the first popular uprising since 1920 of the Iraqi people against British imperialism, because it was a protest against British manipulation and misinterpretation of the 1930 treaty, and because the Soviet Union recognized the Gailânî regime in May 1941.[116] However, the Party started to revise its stand on the Rashîd ʿAlî al-Gailânî movement following the defeat of the Gailânî nationalists at the end of May and the reoccupation of Iraq by the British, and, especially, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The Party now considered the Gailânî revolt to be nothing more than an army coup; it criticized the revolt as badly timed and condemned it for "withholding from the people their constitutional right to organize themselves into parties and trade unions."[117]

In retrospect, the Party interpreted the army's involvement in politics as resulting from the absence of democracy and democratic institutions such as trade unions and poltical parties.[118] Eventually, the leaders of the 1941 nationalist al-Gailânî movement were described in *Al-Sharârah* as "fascist and reactionary sympathizers."[119] In June 1943, the communists even admitted that "our support of the Rashîd ʿAlî al-Gailânî movement, though not unqualified, was a political mistake."[120]

As Fahd became established as the main organizer of the ICP, challenges to his leadership crystallized. The first such challenge to emerge occurred in August 1942, when Thunûn Aiyyûb (Qâdir), a member of the Central Committee, and Yaʿqûb Cohen (Fâḍil), along with their followers, were expelled from the Party and started to publish their own organ, *Ila al-Amâm* (Forward). In an interview with the author, Aiyyûb explained that he was expelled because he had refused to obey Fahd, whom he found "naive and ignorant." He added, "Cohen followed me as my protégé."[121] In Aiyyûb's view, Fahd was not acceptable on account of his ethnic and religious background, "as his family originally came from Turkey."[122] He also accused Fahd of getting drunk during one social event and flirting with Ayyûb's wife.

[115] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 52.
[116] Suʿâd Khairî, *Min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Thawriyyah al-Muʿâṣirah fî al-ʿIrâq*, pp. 80–81.
[117] *Al-Sharârah*, nos. 6–7 (May–June 1941).
[118] Ibid., no. 8 (July 1941).
[119] Ibid., no. 11 (November 1941).
[120] *Al-Qâʿidah*, no. 5 (June 1943), p. 5.
[121] Interview by author with Thunûn Aiyyûb, Baghdad (18 November 1988).
[122] Ibid.

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A more serious split took place a few months later, in November 1942, while Fahd was away in Moscow. During his absence he had entrusted the Party to one of his closest associates and the most prominent member of his Central Committee, ʿAbd-ul-lah Masʿûd Qurainî (Riyâḍ). But Qurainî, along with three other committee members, summoned a Party congress and took over the Party's organization, including *Al-Sharârah*. The three remaining Fahd supporters on the Central Committee, Dâûd Ṣâyegh, Ḥusain Muḥammad al-Shabîbî (Ṣârim), and Zakî Muḥammad Bâsim (Ḥâzim), thereupon established their own paper, *Al-Qâʿidah* (Base), to replace *Al-Sharârah* as the official Party organ; publication began in January 1943.[123] Thereafter, although both groups claimed to represent the ICP, each was known by its publication. Despite mutual bitterness and recriminations, the *Sharârah* group suggested to the *Qâʿidah* group that its followers would return to the mainstream *al-Qâʿidah* group if they were given the right to express their views freely; they even declared, on 6 June 1943, that they were willing to close *Al-Sharârah*. As *al-Sharârah*'s people asserted: "Neither we nor you are, in fact, a Party in the real sense of the word, and the leadership of the Party, regardless of its [formal] titles . . . has already committed many mistakes. Some of them were so detrimental that they may be classified as criminal."[124]

At about the same time, in early 1943, the dissolution of the Comintern took place, an event that Fahd saw as advantageous to the international communist movement in general and to the ICP in particular. The end of the Comintern released the Party from nominal control of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which had overtaken the international communist movement, giving the Party more room to manoeuvre within Iraq's national and regional contexts and allowing Fahd to set the foundation for a new theoretical and organizational direction for the ICP. This new vision was articulated less than a year later, at the ICP's First Party Conference. In a March 1943 article on the impact of the dissolution, Fahd delineated its importance to the Party and the Iraqi situation, declaring:

> Before the [Second World] War when internal and external conditions in different countries were becoming complex, solving the issues of the workers' movements in each country if it had a [controlling] international centre, could face obstacles [locally] that could not be overcome as the profound differences in the historic process of development in each country would at times result in a conflict [between International Centre] positions and those of other countries. The variations in the level of process of the social and political development, [in each country,] in addition to the divergences among the workers' [socio-political] consciousness and organization, all these would result in placing varying responsibilities on the working class [Party] in each country.[125]

[123] Interview by author with Dâûd Ṣâyegh, Baghdad (18 June 1967).
[124] *Al-Sharârah*, no. 7 (August 1943).
[125] *Kitâbât al-Rafiq Fahd* [The Works of Comrade Fahd] (Beirut: Dâr al-Fârâbî, 1976), pp. 358–359.

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He explained that the freedom given the ICP by its release from the Comintern increased the Party's responsibilities since it allowed the Iraqi communists to work with "democratic and popular" forces. This now became the approach followed by the Party under Fahd's leadership.[126]

In February 1944, Dâûd Ṣâyegh, who had supported Fahd in the 1942 split, broke with him and established his own organization, *Râbiṭat al-Shiyûᶜiyyîn al-ᶜIrâqiyyîn* (the League of Iraqi Communists), including its own publication *Al-ᶜAmal* (Action). In its first editorial, in November 1944, *Al-ᶜAmal* attacked Fahd, accusing him of having followed "an adventurist policy despite strong objections and criticism . . . which led to a number of splits and Party revolts." It also published the new group's by-laws and raised the slogan, "Gather around *Al-ᶜAmal* to form a unified and strong Iraqi Communist Party." Later, Ṣâyegh articulated his reasons for breaking away: "We wanted to have a clear programme and publish internal by-laws for the Party. Also, we wanted to have more democracy and less control by the secretary-general. . . . Fahd was an overwhelming personality, but he was also not flexible and sometimes, very dictatorial."[127] He also suggested that Fahd's social background and inellectual limitations made it difficult for Fahd to lead the well-educated intelligentsia of the country.

Other splinter groups, however, began to think seriously of reuniting with the "mother" party, or at least of finding some accommodation with it. Consequently, the *Sharârah* group formally suggested to Fahd that they seek unity, since the police crackdown on every communist splinter group was indiscriminate and the divisions made the crackdown more successful. The *Sharârah* group proposed an immediate merger under a unified temporary central committee that would represent both groups equally and undertake to hold a joint congress within six months. In addition, one Party organ would be published, with an editorial committee representing both groups. At the same time, the two groups would have unified by-laws and programmes on the organizational structure, and the status of members would remain fixed until the congress.[128] Fahd, however, rejected this offer; although he thought the principle of unity was acceptable, the conditions were not. As he explained in an internal Party memo,[129] "The proposed unity of the Central Committee would be artificial and impractical, and in practice would amount to appointing two different Central Committees leading to two different organizations, leaderships, and policies in one Party."[130] Failing to get a favourable response from Fahd, the *Sharârah* group turned its attention to other splinter groups.

[126] Ibid., p. 369.
[127] Interview by author with Dâûd Ṣâyegh, Baghdad (18 June 1967).
[128] Typewritten memorandum from the Shararah Central Committee to the Qâᶜidah Central Committee (n.d.). *Al-Sharârah*, nos. 6–7 (May–June 1941), and *Al-Qâᶜidah*, no. 5 (June 1943).
[129] *Al-Qâᶜidah*, Vol. 2, no. 6 (April 1944).
[130] An internal memo to all Party members, from the 6th Central Committee (n.d. but probably June 1944).

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In September 1944, recovering from severe political repression and in an effort towards reconciliation, the remnants of the *Ila al-Amâm* (Forward) group united with what was left of the *Sharârah* group to create a new organization, *Waḥdat al-Niḍâl* (Unity of the Struggle), with a publication of the same name printed in both Kurdish and Arabic.[131] Further efforts to achieve a more comprehensive reconciliation continued, but Fahd remained strongly critical of his opponents. He rebuffed the splinter groups as opportunists who were out to destroy the Party and compared them to "Mensheviks and traitors."[132] According to Fahd, the splits occurred largely because the Iraqi proletariat was of very recent origin and most of its members had either peasant or artisan backgrounds. This explained why it had not cast off its petit-bourgeois mentality. In addition, the splinter groups had neither experience with opportunistic methods nor sound knowledge of revolutionary theory or practice. Furthermore, a lack of democracy in the country and the ideological confusion caused many people to join the Iraqi Communist Party without themselves being communists, and their presence in the Party's rank and file created more tension and many contradictions.

Fahd dismissed the opposition groups' repeated demands that he call a Party congress to elect a legitimate central committee and establish the Party according to democratic principles. As he put it, the only result would be to expose active Party members to the security forces and send them back to prison, thus allowing traitors and spies to lead the movement in accordance with the interests and wishes of the imperialists.[133] Fahd insisted that all the groups dissolve their memberships and, after they had formally disbanded and delivered their printing equipment and literature to the ICP, return unconditionally, as individual applicants for membership, to the Party. As a result, the Party admitted the Arab section members of the Unity of Struggle group as individuals, not as a group, to avoid "the treachery of local reactionaries, imperialists, and the intrigue of opportunists and terrorists."[134]

Kurdish section members, however, refused to disband, and they continued to "work as a Kurdish Communist Party," known as the *Shursh* group,[135] issuing a paper in Kurdish under the name *Shursh* (Revolution). In 1946 they played an important role in the establishment of the Rizgari Kurd Party (Kurdish Freedom Party), the first popular democratic Kurdish party. The Kurdish Democratic Party, established in August of the same year, later incorporated the majority of Rizgari and a segment of *Shursh*, as well as others; the rest of *Shursh*'s membership either disbanded or rejoined Fahd's party. Among those who rejoined

[131] Iraqi Directorate of Criminal Investigation, *Mawsûʿah Sirriyyah Khâṣṣah bi al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî al-Sirrî*, vol. 3 (Baghdad Government Press, 1949), p. 616.

[132] *Kitâbât al-Rafiq Fahd*, p. 75.

[133] Ibid., p. 56.

[134] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 3, no. 6 (April 1945).

[135] ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj, *Dhâkirat al-Nakhîl* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah lil Dirâsât wa al-Nashr, 1993), p. 147.

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were Ṣalâḥ al-Ḥaidarî, his brother Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, Ḥamîd ʿUthmân, and Nafiʿ Yûnus.[136]

The period 1940–1944 witnessed Fahd's unification of the Party, his increasing public exposure, and a newfound public presence for the ICP. Opposition to Fahd was dismissed as jealousy or personal ambition, and as showing little sophistication in Marxist theory or general political understanding. Fahd's leadership qualities, charisma, and political commitment were increasingly unassailable. For example, Ṣalâḥ al-Ḥaidarî, a close Fahd associate, described Fahd as an "exemplary popular leader in his daily conduct as well as in his relationships with other comrades, in addition to his discernment of the issue of his people, and his acumen of Marxism. However, he was vainglorious."[137] In February 1944, confident of his grip on the leadership, Fahd held the First Party Conference, dubbed the National Charter Conference, in Baghdad. Now in firm control of the Party apparatus, he did not expect any major challenges from the members. Additionally, because of wartime conditions and the British alliance with the Soviet Union, the persecution of the communists in the country had been somewhat relaxed, thus reducing the potential risks involved in organizing the conference. Fahd was also motivated by the example of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, which had just held its own first congress in Beirut from 31 December 1943 to 2 January 1944. Fahd wanted to integrate Marxist-Leninist principles into the specific conditions found in Iraq.[138]

In his report to the conference as secretary-general, Fahd addressed the domestic and international situations. He focused especially on the struggle of the Soviet and Allied nations to speed up the conclusion of the war in order to return to the peaceful world that had been disrupted by the aggression of "Hitler's gang."[139] He stressed that Iraq was still under foreign control, both politically and militarily, and that its foreign policy regarding its Arab and non-Arab neighbours was a tool of British interests.[140] Further, its domestic policy was also influenced by imperialist requirements. Fahd described how Iraq's traditional cottage industries had been destroyed, and how the proletariat was being exploited and forced to live in miserable social and cultural conditions. According to him, the three main causes for this were (1) the theft of Iraqi national wealth by foreign companies; (2) the feudal conditions imposed on peasants (the taxes they paid to *shaikhs* and middlemen amounted to more than half the peasant's income); and (3) the confiscation of public land (*miri*) from the peasants and its transfer to feudal landlords, rich speculators, and government bureaucrats.[141]

[136] Ibid., pp. 147–148.
[137] As quoted by ʿAzîz Sibâhî, *ʿUqûd min Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 219.
[138] For more details, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida), pp. 33–38.
[139] *Kitâbât al-Rafîq Fahd*, p. 103.
[140] Ibid., p. 106.
[141] Ibid., pp. 107–108.

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The main item on the conference agenda was a discussion of the draft of the Party programme, or National Charter. The draft, which Fahd proposed and was later unanimously accepted by the conference, focused on national and broadly democratic goals, with only a few specifically communist demands and ideological concepts included. The Charter called for:

1. National sovereignty to make Iraq a truly independent country (Article 1).
2. Reinstatement of the constitution and implementation of its suspended articles related to the people's democratic rights, including the right to have an elected and truly representative parliament and municipal council (Article 2).
3. Control of speculation and profiteering; provision of basic necessities to the people at reasonable prices (Article 3).
4. Development of the national economy (Article 4).
5. An end to domination by foreign companies over Iraqi agriculture; creation of free markets (Article 4b).
6. A halt to the usurpation of public lands (*miri*) by those in power, and redistribution of those lands in small plots, without charge, to Iraqi peasants (Article 5).
7. Implementation and expansion of Labour Law No. 72 of 1936, and protection of workers and of their right to organize (Article 6).
8. The lifting of the tax burden from people with low incomes, exemption of craftsmen and shopkeepers from municipal fees, and reduction of all indirect taxes (Article 7).
9. Expansion of education among the people without regard to gender or ethnic or social distinctions (Article 8).
10. Recognition of Iraqi women as full citizens with the same social, economic, and political status as Iraqi men (Article 9).
11. The granting of equal rights to Kurd and other minorities in the country (Article 10).
12. Improvement of the lot of Iraqi conscripts, including training them humanely, without flogging or other cruel methods (Article 11).
13. Friendship and cooperation in political, economic, and cultural terms with all democratic peoples; establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR.
14. Political cooperation among all Arabs and their political groups and parties.
15. National liberation and sovereignty for Palestine and for other colonized Arab countries, and full independence for Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon.
16. Cooperation among organizations of workers, students, and intellectuals to raise their national consciousness and exercise their national freedom.

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17. Economic cooperation among the Arab countries to protect their national wealth and raise the standard of living of their peoples; erasing of customs barriers and improvement of communications and commercial exchange.
18. Struggle against political and economic Zionist aggression.[142]

The draft of the National Charter was addressed to the various segments of Iraqi society at the "present stage of national liberation in their struggle for democratic rights,"[143] and its spirit was expressed in the final slogan accepted by the conference: "A Free Homeland and a Happy People." A resolution was then passed to hold the Party's first congress one calendar year later.

Events at the time seemed to promise further communist expansion. On 25 August 1944, Iraq officially recognized the USSR and established full diplomatic relations with Moscow. Two weeks later, on 7 September 1944, the Iraqi government permitted railway workers to organize their own trade union; its inaugural conference was held in November. The conference was attended by over ten thousand railway workers, and the well-known communist and Central Committee member ʿAlî Shukr was elected president of the union. Meanwhile, the communists were also active in union building among Iraq's other labour groupings.[144] Momentum seemed to be in the Party's favour, and on 19 April 1945, the First Party Congress, known as the "Organization Congress," attended by representatives from all Party districts, gathered in Baghdad under the banner "Strengthen Your Party Structure and Strengthen the National Movement's Organization."[145] The highlights of the congress's agenda included the political report of the Central Committee, adoption of the draft of the internal by-laws of the Party, and the election of officers. In his political report, Fahd emphasized the need to work diligently to disseminate communist ideas and condemned British imperialism for its violation of Iraq's sovereignty and interference in Iraqi affairs. He also warned about the British and American rivalry over control of Iraq, and he appealed to the Iraqi people for national unity in their struggle against their common enemies.

Fahd also noted that "the Kurdish issue is a part of the Iraqi liberation package, and the Party is calling for Arab-Kurdish friendship, and a united struggle by both peoples for the solution of their problems."[146] The Party's bylaws recognized its character as being that of a "secret, fighting Party, welded together by iron discipline . . . and committed to the practice of self-criticism" (Article 3). This article was grounded in Iraqi domestic conditions, in which the Party confronted "organized and powerful enemies" and lived under the

[142] Ibid., pp. 133–135, 136–137.
[143] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 2, no. 2 (March 1944).
[144] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb a-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 91.
[145] Iraqi Directorate of Criminal Investigation, *Mawsûʿah Sirriyyah Khâṣṣah bi al-Ḥizb al- Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî al-Sirrî*, p. 771.
[146] *Kitâbât al-Rafîq Fahd*, p. 144.

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rule of "arbitrary and 'Nazi' laws" (Article 21). Moreover, the influence of the then-dominant Stalinist political ideas and patterns within the Party (reflected in Articles 20, 22, 23, and 25 of the by-laws), secured the secretary-general's complete hegemony over the Party apparatus, so that the Central Committee, which he dominated, was empowered to "annul or suspend the resolutions of the Party congresses . . . should the grounds that led to their adoption lapse, or if, in the wake of a change of conditions, their continued enforcement would bring harm to the Party" (Article 13b).

The development of the ICP in the 1930s and 1940s coincided with the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. Fahd's leadership was modelled on Stalinism. According to the semi-official Party historian ʿAzîz Sibâhî, Fahd returned from the Soviet Union influenced by Stalinist dogma; he quoted Fahd as saying, "Whatever Stalin uttered or commanded became a sacred duty to be obeyed, not only by the Soviet party members, the class of the Soviet proletariat, and the Soviet people but also by the international proletariat."[147]

Although Fahd became the undisputed leader of the Party, the character of his leadership and the main focus of his attention both changed after the 1944 conference. Before the conference, he was primarily an organizer, laying the foundation for the ICP in accordance with the Comintern's basic guidelines. After that date, he concentrated more on ideological issues, both to make the Party's orientation more Marxist and to adapt the Party to the unique conditions of Iraq. Soon after the conference, in the autumn of 1945, the ICP publicly advocated the creation of a national front that would unify all national and progressive forces so as:

1. To promote the independence of Iraq and strengthen its national sovereignty by the removal of imperial influence in the country; amend the Iraqi-British Treaty [of 1930]; abolish all articles of the 1930 treaty, that restricted national sovereignty and independence, such as the acceptance of foreign bases and armies; and remove foreign advisors and missions.
2. To introduce a democratic system that would secure and promote public freedom by allowing political parties to form, as well as by ending press censorship and lifting extraordinary and martial laws.[148]

The Party considered this front to be its only safeguard against national and international reactionary groups.[149] During 1945–1946, under Fahd's leadership, the Party further elaborated its strategy and tactics, and became very active in the domestic life of the country.

In the euphoria that followed the end of the Second World War, the Regent and Crown Prince, ʿAbd-ul-ilâh, issued a declaration on 27 December 1945 in which he promised a more democratic Iraq. He blamed all past disturbances on the absence of democracy and called for a new approach to the management

[147] Ibid., p. 217.
[148] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 3, no. 17 (September 1945).
[149] Ibid.

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of Iraqi politics. A short-lived democratic experiment was thus initiated. The public demanded political reforms, and it was especially mobilized against continued British control as articulated in the 1930 treaty. The treaty's abolition became a popular demand articulated in editorials in most newspapers of the time, newspapers that were now free to express all shades of opinion under the new liberalization experiment. To implement the reforms, the semi-liberal government of Tawfîq al-Suwaidî (a liberal, although from the "old guard") was formed in February 1946. The new government, in which al-Suwaidî kept the Ministry of Foreign Affairs portfolio for himself, included in its platform the renegotiation of the 1930 treaty on the basis that conditions had changed since its signing sixteen years earlier. As al-Suwaidî noted, "It became imperative to amend the Treaty as Iraq had progressed . . . towards independence, and to align with international development and the spirit of the newly formed United Nations."[150]

The Interior Ministry was entrusted to a respected reformist, Saᶜd Ṣâliḥ, who, with Suwaidî's encouragement, promoted a democratic environment, relaxed government controls, and allowed freedom of the press. Ṣâliḥ also had the support of the palace and the Crown Prince. Five political parties were officially licensed, with the prime minister heading the Liberal Party (*al-Aḥrâr*), and the Independence Party (*al-Istiqlâl*), having mainly a traditional Arab nationalist orientation, headed by Muḥammad Mahdî Kubbah, a respected political figure. On the moderate left, the National Democratic Party (*al-Waṭanî al-Dîmuqrâṭî*) was headed by Kâmil al-Châdirchî, a well-known intellectual politician with Fabian tendencies, whose 1930 roots extended to the *al-Ahâlî* group discussed earlier. The National Unity Party (*al-Ittiḥâd al-Waṭanî*) was headed by a well-known anti-imperialist and leftist (though not Marxist) intellectual, ᶜAbd-ul-Fattâḥ Ibrâhîm, and finally, the People's Party (*al-Shaᶜb*) was headed by the Marxist, though then not communist, ᶜAzîz Sharîf. The government allowed each party to publish its own official newspaper.

However, Suwaidî's government lasted no longer than three months, since it aroused the opposition of the traditionaly pro-British, antiliberal, staunchly reactionary establishment, who viewed any relaxation of political control as a surrender to the communist-led left and as a return to the chaos of the 1936–1941 period. The old guard viewed the changes in the political environment unleashed by the liberalization measures of the Suwaidî government as endangering to the stability of the country and harmful to their particular interests. This conservative group was led by the famous pro-British personality Nûrî al-Saᶜîd, who was in disfavour in palace circles because of his lack of popular support, and by his protégé, Arshad al-ᶜUmarî, who replaced al-Suwaidî as prime minister on 1 June 1946.[151]

[150] Iraqi Parliament Minutes – Ordinary Meetings, 1945–1945 (Baghdad Government Press), p. 205.

[151] Tawfîq al-Suwaidî, *Mudhakkarâtî: Niṣf Qarn min Târîkh al-ᶜIrâq wa al-Qaḍiyyah al-ᶜArabiyyah* (Beirut: Dâr al-Kâtib al-ᶜArabî, 1969), p. 45.

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For the first time, and to destabilize the political environment, seventeen members of the Senate absented themselves from meetings, making it impossible to form a quorum. This convinced the Crown Prince of the dangers of those liberalization measures to the monarchy.[152] Although Nûrî al-Saʿîd was not a member of the new government, a number of his protégés held important cabinet posts. Despite his claim that his government was to be a transitional one aimed at promoting justice and neutrality, Al-ʿUmarî, a hardliner, was known even in conservative circles (including Nûrî al-Saʿîd's closest allies) as "the least democratic and [most] non-supportive of [the formation of] political parties, and [totally unable to accept] criticism and [political] opposition."[153] Al-ʿUmarî declared that his government would not be addressing the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.[154]

Since al-ʿUmarî was known to be staunchly pro-British and conservative and against liberalization, the public's reaction to his government, especially among the progressive forces, was swift. In an initial editorial response ("The People's Primary Demands and the New Cabinet") in its official newspaper the head of the *Shaʿb* party echoed public sentiment by denouncing the old guard's tactics in forcing the resignation of the Suwaidî government. The editorial outlined the party's demands as "the achieving of independence, national sovereignty, and the freeing of the people from the political, military and economic shackles of colonial control."[155] A series of three editorials ("To the New Government," "The People's Imperative," and "Urgent Demands") summarized these demands as the solution to unemployment and inflation, the exercise of free democratic rights, and a solution to the Palestine issue.[156] Responding to the programme of the new cabinet, the editorials concluded that Iraqi sovereignty was being compromised, and that British penetration of Iraqi affairs had increased. *Shaʿb*'s message was also sceptical about the government's pending elections, and it condemned all government measures to de-license various newspapers and journals.[157] In another editorial ("Imperialism and Its Allies, An Account of the ʿUmarî Cabinet Actions and the Events That Have Occurred Under It"), the newspaper complained that al-ʿUmarî's government had unfairly accused the national movement of falsehood and was opposing the movement under the guise of combating communism. It also condemned the government as undemocratic, particularly in its arrests of citizens, workers, students, and Party members.[158] This editorial was immediately followed by another, which asked, "In Whose Interests Are Events Occurring?" openly asserting in reply that these events were occurring solely in the interests of the British.[159]

[152] Minutes of the Iraqi Senate – Regular Meetings, 1945–1946 (Baghdad Government Press), p. 107.
[153] Khalîl Kannah, *Al-ʿIrâq: Amsuhu wa Ghaduhu* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1966), p. 77.
[154] *Al-ʿIraq*, no. 7135 (Baghdad, 6 June 1946).
[155] *Al-Waṭan*, no. 146 (Baghdad, 7 June 1946).
[156] Ibid., nos. 148–150 (4–6 June 1946).
[157] Ibid., nos. 151, 161, and 164 (7, 19, 23 June 1946).
[158] Ibid., no. 217 (27 August 1946).
[159] Ibid., no. 218 (16 August 1946).

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Eventually, the newspaper asserted that the only alternative left to the national movement for opposing the ʿUmarî oppression was for the Iraqi people to continue "the struggle for liberty and independence."[160] With this in mind, the People's Party (*al-Sha*ʿ*b*) moved to forge a unified position with both the National Democratic Party and the National Unity Party (NUP), and on 30 August 1946 the three parties held a public meeting in the NUP's headquarters. ʿAzîz Sharîf led the criticism of the government, reiterating the same charges that had already been published. Subsequently, the parties issued a joint communiqué calling on the government to resign,[161] and the newspaper *Al-Waṭan* declared, "The policy of the current government has failed and [the government] has to resign."[162]

Azîz Sharîf was arrested and tried, and his paper was suspended for twenty days. However, his own and his party's popularity simply increased, and fifty-five lawyers came forward to defend him in court.[163] *Al-Waṭan*, accepted as the official newspaper of the opposition parties, rapidly became more vocal, more visible, and more popular. When Nûrî al-Saʿîd's ninth government was formed, on 21 October 1946, Sharîf declared in an editorial in *Al-Waṭan* that this was just a continuation of the previous ʿUmarî government. "The ʿUmarî government simply prepared the ground for al-Saʿîd's return to power."[164]

In March 1946, Ḥusain Muḥammad al-Shabîbî (Ṣârim), a member of the Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party, applied to the authorities for permission to establish a legal political party under the name *Ḥizb al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanî* (the Party of National Liberation). While the application was being considered (it was ultimately rejected), the founding committee operated as if the Party were legal and able to conduct activities and propagate its views. One of the cornerstones of *al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanî*'s strategic position was the creation of a national front through cooperation with all anti-imperialist and progressive forces who agreed with the party's proposed goals (they were almost identical to its policies six months earlier). Shabîbî's pamphlet, *Al-Jabhah al-Waṭaniyyah al-Muttaḥidah: Ṭarîqunâ wa Wâjibuna al-Târîkhî* (The United National Front Is Our Path and National Duty), outlined these goals:

1. Achieve complete political independence and strengthen national sovereignty; resist foreign intervention in Iraq's internal affairs; and abolish special military concessions and privileges for foreign armed forces; abrogate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930.
2. Closely cooperate with the Arab peoples and governments striving to free themselves from special foreign privileges and domination; help Arab peoples still under colonial rule to achieve their freedom and exercise their rights to self-determination by forming a national government.

[160] Ibid., no. 220 (28 August 1946).
[161] Ibid., no. 221 (1 September 1946).
[162] Ibid., no. 225 (5 September 1946).
[163] Muḥâkamat al-ʾUstâdh ʿ*Azîz Sharîf Raʾîs Ḥizb al-Sha*ʿ*b* (Baghdad: Dâr al-Amal, 1946).
[164] *Al-Waṭan*, no. 246 (Baghdad, 30 November 1946).

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3. Strengthen the democratic system in Iraq through the abolition of all laws and policies that deny or stand against the right of citizens to exercise their democratic freedoms, and enact new laws to implement their freedom.
4. Purge the administrative apparatus of corrupt elements and practices and make it an efficient agency dedicated to serving the interests of the people.
5. Enforce comprehensive reforms in the social and economic life of the country, including agriculture and industry; expand education to the masses; and provide welfare to the poor.[165]

National unity was stressed by Fahd as well:

> Our aim is to eliminate the conditions of suffering of the Iraqi people by working within a framework of a true and conscious national movement whose aim is to struggle to achieve our democratic freedoms and economic and political rights. The National Front unifies activities for the sake of achieving the aims which all participants are striving for, such as: (1) the right to both political and non-political organizations; (2) freedom of the press and of association; (3) repeal of all emergency regulations; (4) protection of the country's independence and its national sovereignty; and (5) combating fascism.[166]

Although in 1946 Tawfîq al- Suwaidî's government permitted the formation of political parties and restrained government oppression, it did not extend the right to organize to the Iraqi Communist Party. As a result, the communists sought to penetrate legal left-wing parties, particularly the People's Party (*al-Sha'b*), the National Unity Party (outlawed one year after its establishment), and the rival National Democratic Party (which also was eventually outlawed in 1954). During this period, the ICP succeeded in broadening its support among students and women's and trade union organizations, and in leading a wave of labour unrest in 1946–1947. On 21 December 1946, al-Shabîbî sent a letter from his prison cell on behalf of the founding executive of the National Liberation Party to the minister of the interior denouncing Nûrî al-Sa'îd's government for its anti-democratic and non-nationalist approach, and describing it as an extension of the reactionaries' designs to "resist the people's national movement and deny their democratic freedoms."[167]

Al-Sa'îd's government responded four weeks later, on 18 January 1947, when it arrested the top sixteen members of the Party leadership, including Fahd, on charges of advocating communism. According to Article 89a of the Iraqi Penal Code, communism was designed to subvert constitutional order and incite armed insurrection through infiltration of the armed forces, with the financial assistance of, and contact with, a foreign state (the Soviet Union), a charge rejected by all the accused. Fahd, who never denied that he was the secretary-general of the Party, attempted to rebut the charges in court. On 24 June 1947, he was found guilty and sentenced to death, as were his second in command,

[165] *Kitâbât al-Rafiq Ḥusain Muḥammad al-Shabîbî* [The Works of Comrade Hussein] (Baghdad: Adib Press, 1974), p. 7.
[166] *Kitâbât al-Rafiq Fahd*, p. 57.
[167] Letter from Husain Muḥammad al-Shabîbî, published 21 January 1947.

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Zakî Bâsim, and Ibrâhîm Nâjî Shumaiyyil; the others arrested were sentenced to various terms of hard labour. The death sentences were commuted on 13 July; Fahd was sentenced to life imprisonment and Shumaiyyil and Bâsim were each given fifteen years. The sentences of the remaining ICP leaders were similarly reduced. According to the Party newspaper, the crackdown took place because the government "fears the Communist Party will hinder the colonial projects."[168]

Although the ICP members' trial before the Iraqi high court dragged on for almost two years, this did not prevent Fahd and the ICP from playing a leading role in the *al-Wathbah* riots that compelled Prime Minister Ṣâliḥ Jabr to resign on 27 January 1948. Even though Fahd was in prison in October 1947, in a strategically bold move he directed the caretaker leadership of the Party to call for the creation of the *Lajnat al-Taʿâwun al-Waṭanî* (Committee for National Cooperation). This committee was to include all leftist parties, including *al-Shaʿb*, the National Unity Party, the progressive members of the National Democratic Party, and the underground Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq. A leftist non-communist, Kâmil Qazanchî, was chosen to chair the committee, which took on a powerful role three months later in organizing and directing the activities of the *Wathbah* (uprising).

According to police records, on 23 January 1948 Qazanchî inflamed the demonstrators in a speech that he gave during the huge demonstrations in Baghdad. He proclaimed: "Let us declare it a great people's revolution, and struggle to reform [this execrable] situation until the formation of a people's government, including all classes."[169] The *al-Wathbah* swept Baghdad and other large cities following the government's provisional signing of the Portsmouth Treaty with Britain on 15 January 1948. The 1930 treaty, which was due to expire in 1958, tied Iraq strategically to Britain through Britain's establishment and control of military bases across Iraq, and its abrogation was the principal demand of the Iraqi opposition. An ICP pamphlet entitled *The Treaty Is Null and We Must Declare Its Abrogation,* expressed official ICP policy; it maintained that the 1930 treaty was illegal since it had been concluded under duress. In addition, treaty articles that required Iraq to consult with Britain restricted Iraq's foreign policy and tied it to a colonial foreign policy that negated Iraq's sovereignty, which was implicit in the country's membership in the United Nations.[170] The pamphlet also asserted that the treaty changed "the temporary mandate into a permanent occupation."[171]

By the end of December 1947, an agreement had been reached between Britain and the pro-British government of Ṣâliḥ Jabr, the first Shiʿi prime minister in Iraq's modern history. The opposition, however, interpreted this

[168] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 5, no. 3 (June 1947).

[169] Police Records of the Criminal Investigation, Confidential Letter no. 266, 24 January 1948, in a file entitled, "Demonstrations and Strike."

[170] ʿAbd-ul-Raḥîm Sharîf, *Muʿâhadat 1930 Bâṭilah: Yajibu Ilghâʾuha* (Baghdad: al-Shaʿb Party, 1948), pp. 6–11.

[171] Ibid., p. 7.

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agreement as a capitulation to the British since the proposed treaty prolonged Britain's control of the Iraqi military for a further twenty-five years by institutionalizing Iraqi dependence upon British supplies and military training and by surrendering Iraqi bases to Britain in times of war. The agreement was clearly designed to integrate Iraq into regional military pacts that would serve British interests. Following Jabr's resignation, the caretaker government of Muḥammad al-Ṣadr, though respected by most of the nationalist forces, who had urged him to accept the position, dissolved parliament and declared martial law on 22 February 1948. But al-Ṣadr acquiesced to popular Iraqi opinion by promising not to ratify the Portsmouth Treaty. The proposed revision of the treaty had been pushed by the Regent to win favour with the nationalists, though ultimately his plan backfired because they continued to portray him as a British stooge. Britain's role and actions in Palestine, which were increasingly regarded by all Arab nationalists, including the Iraqi opposition, as yet another betrayal of the Arabs by the British, reinforced the negative view of the Regent.

In early 1948, the ICP reached the pinnacle of its influence, recruiting Iraqi students studying across the Arab world and as far away as Europe. The Party even briefly issued a daily paper called *Al-Asâs* (The Foundation), edited by Sharîf al-Shaikh, an active communist and well-known lawyer, but it was soon banned by the authorities.[172] In addition, starting in October 1948 the Iraqi police once again made a concerted effort to spy on and suppress the ICP. Guided by information provided them by Mâlik Saif, the interim secretary-general who turned informer,[173] the authorities arrested hundreds of communists, including many of the Party's top leaders and organizers. Fahd and the rest of the leadership were again forced to stand trial, which this time resulted in their execution in Baghdad on 14 February 1949. Reeling from the decapitation of its leadership and the persecution of its cadres, the Party went through a period of fragmentation between November 1948 and June 1949. During this time, five splinter groups emerged, each describing itself as the "true" Iraqi Communist Party, each maintaining individual politburos and central committees, and each producing its own newspaper. According to Hanna Batatu, "The Communists split into five mutually hostile groups – *al-Ḥaqiqah* (The Truth), *al-Najmah* (The Star), *al-Ṣawâb* (The Right), *al-Ittiḥâd* (The Union), and the old *Qâᶜidah* (the Grassroots) group."[174]

The Party in the 1950s

Hitherto insulated from developments abroad, the ICP during the 1950s must be understood within its local, regional, and international contexts. Iraq suffered a number of political upheavals during this period, and in the span of three years,

[172] Interviews by the author with Zakî Khairî, Damascus (18 March 1987), and ᶜAbd-ul-Khâliq al-Bayâtî, Baghdad (27 September 1960).
[173] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 567–568.
[174] Ibid., p. 571.

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1948 to 1952, five governments passed in rapid succession. During Nûrî al-Saʿîd's eleventh government, lasting from 16 September 1950 to 12 July 1952, oppression of leftist activities again became a focus of the Iraqi government. In September 1951, so that opposition forces could confront Nûrî al-Saʿîd's government, the ICP proposed a programme of cooperation in the form of a national front. The National Front put forward a number of bold proposals including nationalization of the oil industry, radical land reform, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, the right to form political parties and unions, and recognition by Iraq of the People's Republic of China. Although this agenda did not produce immediate results, the steps set in motion by the formation of a national front led six years later to the 1958 Qasim coup.[175] In 1952, al-Saʿîd's government refused to accede to the demands for more democratic reforms that emanated from legal opposition parties such as *al-Istiqlâl* (the Independence Party) and the the National Democratic Party, from prominent individuals, and from the clandestine Peace Partisans of the ICP. All, and particularly the nationalist and leftist organizations, called for an easing of Nûrî al-Saʿîd's ban on radical opposition parties and a reduction in Iraq's dependence on Western-sponsored military alliances. These democratic and nationalist forces further demanded the complete rejection of Iraq's integration into the US-sponsored Baghdad Pact, to which Nûrî al-Saʿîd was preparing to tie Iraq.

The crisis came to a head with the opposition's demand that the government curtail foreign control of Iraq's petroleum sector. Britain's control of Iraq's oil had become the most pronounced symbol of British domination of the country and demands that Iraq emulate Iran's nationalization of the petroleum sector gave opposition political forces an issue around which to rally the public.[176] The government settled for a less confrontational policy by renegotiating its revenue agreements with the Iraqi Petroleum Company.[177] On 12 July 1952, after less than two years in office, Nûrî al-Saʿîd was again forced to resign as prime minister, but this did not satisfy opposition groups, and unrest continued as the opposition parties successfully mobilized the population against the conservative pro-British government that followed him. This mobilization was fuelled by the 26 May 1951 licensing of a new political party, *Al-Jabhah al-Shaʿbiyyah al-Muttaḥidah* (Popular Unified Front Party), which immediately and successfully moved to coordinate its activities with other opposition groupings, particularly the National Democratic Party.

At the same time, other opposition groups, including communist-sponsored leftist organizations such as the Union of Democratic Youth, the League of Women's Rights, the General Union of Iraqi Students, and a number of Peasant Associations, as well as the Arab Baʿth Socialist Party and the Arab Nationalist

[175] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 9, no. 16 (end of September 1951).

[176] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 8, no. 3 (April 1950), and *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 9, no. 13 (early April 1952).

[177] *Liwâʾ al-Istiqlâl* (Baghdad, 19 May 1954); *Ṣawt al-Ahâlî* (Baghdad, 16 May 1954); also see Fâḍil Ḥusain, *Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanî al-Dîmuqrâṭi, 1946–1958* (Baghdad: al-Shaʿb Press, 1963), p. 352.

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Movement (ANM), all emerged to oppose the government through increasingly sophisticated organizational and ideological support for the vocal opposition. Later, in 1951, student unrest sparked massive anti-government riots in Baghdad, forcing the resignation of Muṣṭafâ al-ʿUmarî (Nûrî al-Saʿîd's successor) on 22 November 1952. The increasing disorder forced the Crown Prince to appoint yet another interim government, headed this time by General Nûrî al-Dîn Maḥmûd, the army chief of staff, which lasted from 23 November 1952 to 29 January 1953. In response, the ICP censured the military government, accusing Maḥmûd, the new prime minister, of "[wanting] to establish a military dictatorship through the imposition of martial law and the unleashing of the 'spies of the Gestapo' against the people." Indeed, Maḥmûd arrested thousands of Peace Partisans, communists, and democrats for the sole purpose of suppressing the popular movement and reinforcing the dictatorial and feudal colonial system.[178] He also declared martial law and banned all political parties.

Elections held on 17 January 1953 saw Nûrî al-Saʿîd's party win 77 of the 138 parliamentary seats through acclamation. Only 11 seats were won by the Popular Unified Front, which, although banned, was supported by the opposition.[179] On 5 October 1953, soon after martial law ended and the order to ban opposition parties was lifted, normal political activities resumed. A succession of cabinets followed, none of which lasted longer than nine months. Nûrî al-Saʿîd became prime minister once again in August 1954 and almost immediately began to suppress all political opposition. He also opened negotiations with Turkey, Britain, Iran, and Pakistan over a pro-Western "Northern Tier" defence system. As a result of these discussions Iraq joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), which thereupon changed its name to the Baghdad Pact. The organization's first meeting was held in Baghdad in November 1955.

By the mid-1950s, events in other Arab countries had begun to affect the political climate in Iraq. The 23 July 1952 revolution in Egypt soon gained regional prominence through promoting a policy of positive neutralism, including cordial relations and arms deals with the socialist bloc, all in an effort to promote Arab liberation from colonialism and Zionism.[180] The downfall of the military regime of Adîb al-Shishaklî in Syria in February 1954, and the resurgence of Syrian national political life, drew Egypt and Syria closer together. In autumn 1956, parliamentary elections in Jordan saw the job of prime minister go to Sulaimân al-Nâbulsî, the head of a leftist-nationalist coalition that was sympathetic to Nasser's Egypt and was in favour of Arab unity in general and of unity with Syria in particular. The last vestiges of colonialism in the Arab world

[178] *Al-Qâʿidah*, vol. 10, no. 26 (end of November 1952).

[179] *Al-Zamân* (Baghdad, 18 January 1953 and 19 January 1953).

[180] The impact of the Egyptian revolution should not be underestimated, and the feeling at that time in much of the Arab world, and especially in Egypt, was almost as if Nasser were a figure whose significance could rival that of Muḥammad ʿAlî or of Ṣalâḥu-d-Dîn.

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seemed to be disappearing. The Algerian revolt began in 1954, and Morocco, Tunisia, and Sudan all won formal independence by 1955. Moreover, Egypt's political victory in the 1956 Suez War served to heighten anti-imperialist sentiment throughout the region, giving Nasser's Egypt a pre-eminent position in Arab politics, and crystallizing Nasserist Pan-Arabism as an almost irresistible political force.

This period also saw two significant developments within the international communist movement. The first of these was the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, which provided Arab Marxists with an alternative, and in many ways (since China was a Third World country) a more attractive, model of social revolution than the Soviet prototype. The second was the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent landmark Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow in January 1956: this ushered in sweeping changes in Soviet policy towards non-aligned bourgeois states such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, India, and Indonesia and towards bourgeois nationalist movements in the Third World. The Soviet leadership endorsed the five principles of nonalignment enunciated at the Bandung Conference in April 1955 and also adopted a more favourable position towards Arab liberation movements.

During this period, the Iraqi Communist Party was attempting to recover organizationally from the execution of its leadership in 1949 and to bounce back from being rebuffed by the nationalists following its support of the Soviet recognition of Israel in 1948; at the same time, it was trying to get over the ideological and organizational confusion that had arisen inside the Party itself. Since power remained concentrated in the hands of the secretary-general of the Party, those now at the Party's helm, who though not strictly secretaries-general nevertheless exercised all the functions and authority of the position, sought to emulate Fahd. Accordingly, they attempted to leave their mark by changing the Party's by-laws, procedures, and internal workings. Yet they often found themselves making decisions that were beyond their abilities and intellects, decisions that proved detrimental to the Party. On the organizational level, in June 1949, Party leadership was taken up by a young, inexperienced Kurd who used the pseudonym Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî (Bâsim). A twenty-two-year-old high school dropout, Nûrî came from Takiyah, a small village just outside Sulaymaniyah which had been a centre for Kurdish nationalism in the 1940s. Nûrî rose to the pinnacle of Party leadership in fewer than four years after he joined it. He quickly initiated a major reorganization and restructuring at all levels.[181]

Nearly five decades later, Nûrî admitted that he did not have "the intellectual or practical experience that qualified me for the central leadership . . . in such a highly complex and sensitive [period] as a result of the Party's setback. However, between November 1948 and June 1949 I had to establish another leadership

[181] Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, *Mudhakkarât Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî* (Sulaimaniyyah, Kurdistân: n.p. 1992), p. 36.

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centre."[182] According to Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, he reconstructed a new Central Committee to replace the executed Party leadership,

> which included seven members I chose personally from the cadre. It did not occur to me, or [to] anyone else in those days, that they should be elected in any way. The group included, in addition to myself, a port worker from Basra, Nâṣir ʿAbbûd, a textile worker from Baghdad, Ṣâdiq al-Falâḥî, a dismissed primary school teacher from a strong peasant background by the name of Karîm Aḥmad, the expelled Baghdadi student Muḥammed Râḍî Shubbar, and an expelled government worker from a middle-class background named Sâlim al-Chalabî, and finally, the expelled student from Sulaimaniyah who came from a poor peasant background named Kakah Falâḥ. This step [forming the Central Committee] did not put an end to the practice of the personality cult and the bureaucratic inflexibility which was prevalent in the ICP, as well as in the communist parties in a number of other, particularly underdeveloped, countries. I was raised in this mental setting and practice. We used to idolize Fahd as if he was a god or a prophet. . . . this glorification of a single person used continuously to strengthen the personality cult in the Party. . . . we considered Fahd to be a local god, in addition to the greater gods in the world of the communist movement. . . . I stayed on the top of the [pyramid] of the Central Committee, as was every other secretary within the apparatus of the Party. There was no regularity in the meetings of our Central Committee. Its members were not of a [high] intellectual or political calibre that would have allowed it to exercise any collective leadership. Events proved that I was the most qualified among the members of the Central Committee, despite my low level of qualifications.[183]

Nonetheless, confident of his control, Nûrî embarked at the end of 1951 on an ideological reshaping of the Party.[184] He solidified his leadership in a Party conference in the spring of 1952, at which he imposed a new and radical Party programme without having held any Party congress or conference to discuss or approve the changes. In the 1952 conference, he replaced the earlier, more moderate platform approved by the First Party Congress under Fahd, and for the first time in the ICP's history, there was a call for the establishment of a popular republican regime in Iraq through revolution. Such a regime would eradicate British influence, nationalize the oil industry, and broaden public freedom by unifying all opposition groupings into a popular front spearheaded by the communists. This new programme caused an ideological split within the Party over the tactics to be employed in selecting the groups for the proposed popular front.

ʿAzîz Muḥammad, Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, and ʿAbd-ul-Salâm al-Nâṣirî, who were all then in prison, disagreed with the Party's new programme, declaring it to be illegal. In addition, Zakî Khairî, who was also in prison, led a strong protest against the new Party platform; this resulted in the immediate expulsion of the dissidents from the ICP, along with all those who supported them, including ʿAbd-ul-Razzâq al-Ṣâfî. Bâsim further denounced the group at the end of February 1953, identifying them by name in *Al-Qâʿidah*, the Party organ, as

[182] Ibid., p. 52.
[183] Ibid., pp. 96–97.
[184] Ibid., p. 103

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"opportunist and subversive," and thereby also revealing their identities to the police. Those who were expelled respondend by announcing the formation of their own organization, and Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî emerged as its spokesman. They issued a publication, *Râyat al-Shaghîlah* (The Worker's Banner), which then became the popular name of the group. Al-Ḥaidarî devoted himself and his group to challenging Bâsim and his supporters, and even attempted to win recognition from the international communist movement as the official Iraqi Communist Party by affirming the group's loyalty to the Soviet Union. In the sixth issue of *Râyat al-Shaghîlah*,[185] al-Ḥaidarî's group described the Soviet Union as "our first country in loyalty and love." The group also participated in the International Youth Festival held in Warsaw in 1955. However, the CPSU did not recognize the group and continued to view it as a splinter group.

Even after Bâsim's arrest in April 1953, his group continued its assault on ICP dessidents by repeatedly publishing the names of dissident group members over the 1953–1954 period, calling them agents of the security forces and "royalists, deviationists and destructive" people. The ICP's official leadership continued to expound Bâsim's Party line in the pages of *Al-Qâᶜidah*, and in this environment, another underground Marxist group emerged in late 1950 under the leadership of ᶜAzîz Sharîf. Initially named *Lajnat al-Waᶜi al-Mârkisî* (the Committee for a Marxist Understanding), it eventually transformed itself into *Waḥdat al-Shiyûᶜiyyîn fî al-ᶜIrâq* (the Unity of Communists in Iraq), with roots in *Ḥizb al-Shaᶜb*, the Marxist party mentioned earlier. The licence of *Ḥizb al-Shaᶜb* had been revoked in September 1947, and its paper, *Al-Waṭan* (The Homeland), had been closed down in 1948. It had been distinguished by its passionate attacks on both the Soviet position on the partition of Palestine and the ICP tolerance of this Soviet policy. The basic aim of the new *Lajnat al-Waᶜi al-Mârkisî* was

> to correct both the non-Marxist deviationist approach of the CPSU, and the mindless followers of what was left of the ICP . . . in addition to a renewed study of Marxism, not as exported by Soviet theoreticians, but as read and interpreted by genuine free Arab Marxists. Marx gave only guidelines and principle, and it is the Marxists who should apply these principles and interpret events as these relate to their environment. . . . Marxist analysis could be applied to the Arab national liberation and the Palestine issue in complete independence from the Soviet government line. This would inevitably lead to a different interpretation, and either Marxism would become irrelevant for us, or we would become an arm of the Soviet state.[186]

On these principles, ᶜAzîz Sharîf attempted to build a new communist movement, contending that

> the ICP is no longer a viable progressive Marxist Iraqi organization and its fragmentation is the evidence of its demise. However, there are so many communists who have left it, mainly because of its non-Marxist, non-communist interpretations of Arab and Iraqi

[185] Al-Ḥâjj, *Dhâkiarat al-Nakhîl*, pp. 158–159.
[186] Interview by author with ᶜAzîz Sharîf, Baghdad (18 October 1973).

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issues. Thus, we need a new, genuine communist movement, and for that reason we established the *Waḥdat al-Shiyûᶜiyyîn fî al-ᶜIrâq* (Party of the Unity of Communists in Iraq) which will reunite all these splinter groups, along with all the individuals who have deserted the Party, within a truly genuine democratic Marxist, Iraqi Communist Party.[187]

Al-Qâᶜidah exposed the members of the ᶜAzîz Sharîf group by publishing their full names in issue 9 in October 1950. Nevertheless, ᶜAzîz Sharîf's group called for and held a party conference, which was attended by representatives of most of the splinter groups as well as by independent communists. The participants elected a new Politburo and Central Committee and published *Al-Niḍâl* (The Struggle) as its official newspaper. The *Al-Qâᶜidah* group considered this conference to be "opportunist and destructivist against the communist Party."[188] Then, with the arrest of Bâsim, and the further fragmentation of the Party, a new leadership began to emerge within the ICP.

Despite its internal disarray, the worsening political conditions, and increased government oppression, the ICP still managed to devote its energies to the Iraqi political arena. Focusing on the integration of its activities with the democratic and nationalist opposition, the ICP gradually emerged more clearly as a politically moderate and unified party, largely through the efforts of Ḥusain Aḥmad al-Râḍî (Salâm ᶜÂdil). Salâm ᶜÂdil (1922–1963), a Shiᶜi from Najaf, graduated from the Teacher's Preparatory School in 1943 and a year later was appointed a government grammar school teacher in the southern city of Diwaniyah. There he joined the ICP in 1944 and was soon promoted to the city's Party committee. Two years later, he was fired from his teaching job because of his political activities.

ᶜÂdil left Diwaniyah for Baghdad, where he worked as a food vendor and a bus inspector. He soon began organizing the bus conductors and workers to demand better conditions and wages. This resulted in his being fired again, although shortly thereafter he secured a low-paying job as a teacher in a private Kurdish school, with the help of his future father-in-law, the former director of the Diwaniyah Education District and now the principal of a Baghdad preparatory school for rural teachers. Later, after ᶜÂdil's re-instatement to his government teaching position, again with the help of his patron, ᶜÂdil was reassigned to the teachers' preparatory school. He was fired again, at the end of 1948, after which he left teaching and opened a shop that became a pick-up location for the Party. During the public unrest and demonstrations in 1949, he was arrested for organizing and leading demonstrations. He was tried by a military court and sentenced to three years in prison, with an additional two years' probation to be served outside of Baghdad. While he was incarcerated in the notorious desert prison of Nuqrat al-Salmân, his sentence was increased to five years for his continued political activities. After his release in June 1953, he ignored the probationary conditions and managed to go underground,

[187] Ibid.

[188] *Al-Qâᶜidah*, no. 15 (1951).

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rejoining the embattled Party at a time when its organization and morale were low.

As already mentioned, following the execution of Fahd, and as a result of widespread surveillance and an intense police crackdown, leadership of the ICP fell into the hands of a succession of young, inexperienced but committed and energetic caretakers, none of whom was selected through proper Party procedures. Many came from the Party's Kurdish section, which, because the surveillance was focused on Baghdad and in the south of Iraq, had been spared the crackdown.

Two months before ʿÂdil's release, Bâsim, the last of the powerful temporary Party leaders, was himself arrested on 13 April 1953, and with this, the Party structure collapsed once again. Party control then passed to yet another inexperienced leader, Karîm Aḥmad Dâûd, also from the Kurdish section, who attempted to rebuild the repeatedly decimated Party. Although Dâûd was committed to communism, "his intellectual capabilities and organizational skills left much to be desired. As a matter of fact, his ascent to the first position in the Party had been engineered by a fellow Kurd, Ḥamîd ʿUthmân, who had always influenced him strongly when both served on the Central Committee."[189] Dâûd asked ʿÂdil to take charge of the organizational section of the southern Party, where he distinguished himself. ʿÂdil's star continued to rise. A year later, as a result of his successful organizational efforts, ʿÂdil was elevated to the Central Committee.

On 1 January 1954, in ʿÂdil's first meeting as a member of Central Committee, the committee discussed the final draft of a political report ("The National Front Struggle Against War and Imperialism") that he had played a prominent role in formulating. He later acknowledged that the report articulated "his vision, and the first theoretical articulation of his ideas" and that it became the foundation on which he built his Party politics.[190] The report stressed that revolutionary conditions in Iraq required the Party to have a clear strategy, since the progressive forces in the country "will view our Party as a political force, only if our policy is realistic . . . [and can] achieve the goals of our people in peace, national independence and democratic freedom. Thus, we must have an [explicit] strategy before we engage in any battle."[191] The report then proposed a framework for action through a broad national front that would

> include all the anti-war and anti-Imperialist forces . . . [and] with these national groups, we must together enter the battle. First, however, there has to be an identification of the forces that make up this front which would be composed of workers, peasants, intellectuals, small business people, professionals, and the [enlightened] bourgeoisie from among the merchants, factory owners, and national capitalists – in the meantime, we must recognize the historic role of the working class in that front.[192]

[189] Interview by author with Zakî Khairî, Damascus (18 March 1987).
[190] Interview by author with Salâm ʿÂdil, Baghdad (8 December 1959).
[191] Iraqi Communist Party, *Jabhat al-Kifâḥ al-Waṭanî ḍid al-Istiʿmâr wa al-Ḥarb* (Baghdad: ICP, 1954), pp. 1–4.
[192] Ibid., p. 11

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In addition, the report outlined the basic goal of the proposed national front as being "the creation of a national democratic government . . . that will march towards building a better society devoid of imperialism, oppression and feudalism."[193] It also explained that such a government would abrogate the 1930 treaty with Britain, expel British forces from Iraq, and refuse to align Iraq through treaties with any imperialist forces. Further, it would nationalize the oil companies, confiscate their property, and liberate the Iraqi national economy from their control.[194] The proposed government would allow democratic freedoms, amend the existing constitution to make government more participatory, abolish reactionary laws, free all political prisoners, dismantle the feudal system by distributing land to the peasants and reducing taxes on them, impose a graduated income tax system, improve the conditions of workers, and, finally, grant the Kurdish people and other minorities political, cultural, and administrative rights.[195] The ideal government advocated by the ICP would be one constructed by "the national front composed of the union of all parties, organizations, and democratic personalities, including the Iraqi Communist Party."[196] It should be noted, however, that these principles and aims were not unique to the ICP and that they in fact reflected the general bearing of almost all the major opposition parties at the time. The party programme signalled a change towards increased cooperation and coordination between the ICP and other opposition groups, as opposed to the previous practice of mutual suspicions.

This bilateral approach of reconciliation and pragmatism allowed ᶜÂdil more space to manoeuvre the Party closer to the democratic and nationalist opposition. As ᶜÂdil argued more than once:

> If we are to succeed as a Party, we must have a political presence; and to have a political presence, we must become politically acceptable and work with the majority of the progressive political forces in the country. On paper, our rhetoric, is very extreme but our political impact is minimal on the ground. . . . Thus, I feel, and argue very strongly in the Central Committee, that at this stage our priority must first be to unite all nationalist and progressive groups into a national front – to be one of them and influence their political actions as they influence ours. . . . Through that, we can serve the people and gain credibility for the Party.[197]

An ICP circular on 2 September 1953 seemed to reflect this new direction, and when it was declared that the ICP's aim was to establish a "national democratic government," ᶜÂdil's influence grew within the Party. His personal qualities also helped him gain the confidence of his Central Committee comrades, to whom he appeared forceful, competent, and self-confident. He was a sportsman, an artist, a skilled calligrapher, an avid reader, and a good speaker, and his colleagues found him pleasant to be with. According to Mahdî ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm, a student

[193] Ibid., p. 28.
[194] Ibid., p. 31.
[195] Ibid., p. 32.
[196] Ibid., p. 33.
[197] Interview by author with Salâm ᶜÂdil, Baghdad (8 December 1959).

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who later became one of ʿÂdil's closest friends, and who knew him for over two decades, ʿÂdil's personality and talents were impressive:

He had the very unusual talent of making you feel valued, and soon after talking to him you realized he was a man of integrity who liked people but was angry at how people were treated. Yet the manner in which this was expressed was calm and reasoned, and whatever he did, he aroused a trust in himself and in those around him. His ideas took fire and though he was humble, he enforced strict Party discipline.[198]

At about this time, the Iraqi Central Committee was invited by the British Communist Party to attend the Second London Conference of the Communist Parties within the Sphere of British Imperialism, to be held from 21 to 24 April 1954. The ICP chose ʿÂdil to represent the Party. Raḥîm ʿAjînah, then a medical student active in the ICP chapter in Britain, acted as ʿÂdil's translator and host while he was at the conference and even presented the ICP's speech because of ʿÂdil's poor English. Four decades later, ʿAjînah described his experience with ʿÂdil in those early days:

I was impressed with the man's intellect and his sophisticated understanding of Marxist concepts. While dictating the speech in Arabic, he struggled with every word of its translation, and made me check the meaning so many times in the Oxford dictionary. His theoretical interpretations of the conditions of Iraq and the world were his main preoccupation and were novel but, at first glance, looked far-fetched. ʿÂdil insisted, "Theory is great, but it's an Iraqi party, and theory is to serve and explain, not dictate solutions." When he explained their relevance and the application of the theory, the interpretations sounded refreshing. They were not the usual, rigid Marxist-Leninist approach; rather, they were dynamic, fitted our situation, but were certainly not the orthodox Soviet line. . . . He kept us all going, was diligent and did not waste a minute while he was in London, meeting all the delegates, and re-establishing the ICP's international contacts, including those with the CPSU and Eastern European countries. Thus he set the foundation for the Party's return to the international communist movement, which had been interrupted with the arrest and eventual execution of Fahd.[199]

According to ʿAbd-ul-Khâliq al-Bayâtî, at the time an Iraqi engineering student active in the London branch of the ICP, as well as president of the Iraqi Student Society in the United Kingdom, ʿÂdil's role was crucial in rejuvenating the Party abroad:

The group was active but had little contact with the home Party. As soon as ʿÂdil came to London, he held a number of meetings and visited groups and students, even those who had lost contact with us. With his personality, knowledge, and enthusiasm he brought a lot of us back, so much so that we felt reborn, and at the time I was so taken by it that my fiancée and I donated all our wedding savings to the Party, and everybody acted in a similar way. He kept us working as translators and guides for him in London, where he managed to secure appointments with numerous leftist and progressive British

[198] Interview by author with Mahdî ʿAbd-ul-Karîm, Arbil, Kurdistan (18 June 1981).
[199] Interview by author with Raḥîm ʿAjînah, London (19 April 1994).

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political activists. He was meticulous in his preparation and used to grill us on issues, personalities, and our knowledge of ideologies. He was sociable, pleasant, and always on the go.[200]

Similarly, Anîs ʿAjînah, who was then in charge of the London branch of the ICP, and the most active member of the Iraqi Students' Society in the United Kingdom, saw ʿÂdil's visit as revitalizing the movement. "With his [ʿÂdil's] visit, we began regularizing our contributions to the Party on a monthly basis and we delivered more than £3,000 to him, which was a lot of money in those days, in a way giving the Party, in this critical stage, a financial shot in the arm, and also [giving] ʿÂdil more clout within the financially pressed Central Committee."[201] This support also accorded the London group special standing within the Party, especially when these students returned to Iraq in the mid-1950s, enriching the intellectual foundations of the Party and permeating the professional associations they would belong to. Thus, they made the Party more visible in Iraq, especially as they gradually rose in Iraqi society, in some cases assuming influential positions in their respective professional associations. As time passed, the impact of this influnce became evident, particularly in Baghdad, the political nerve centre of the country.

Returning to Baghdad, ʿÂdil conneted with the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party, making it the primary point of contact for the ICP internationally. He also informed the Central Committee of the determination of the international communist movement "to support our Party based on their faithful commitment to the international proletariat."[202] His performance at the conference had enhanced his stature in the Central Committee as an effective international figure. Because of the success of his participation in the April conference in London and the restoration of the ICP's contact, lost in 1949, with the international communist movement, the Central Committee gave ʿÂdil charge of the Baghdad section. This position gave him the most prominent role in the Party's national scene, placing him in the forefront of Iraqi political opposition and putting him in touch with all the other opposition groups. It allowed him to be directly involved in the national political process, as did his other assignment as liaison officer for national relations between the ICP and the nationalist and opposition forces. These posts gave ʿÂdil the chance to implement both his personal ideas and the ideas contained in the Central Committee's report "The National Front Struggle Against War and Imperialism." As already noted, this report both reflected his personal views and had convinced the Central Committee to abandon its past extremist positions. Thus was initiated what might be dubbed a "post-Fahd" period, in which a more practical stance brought the ICP closer to other opposition parties and eventually allowed the Party to work with those parties in a national front. Further, it opened up a direction in the ICP's development that has influenced the Party up to the present.

[200] Interview by author with ʿAbd-ul-Khâliq al-Bayâtî, Baghdad (27 September 1960).
[201] Interview by author with Anîs ʿAjînah, Baghdad (17 March 1974).
[202] *Al-Qâʿidah*, no. 5 (June, 1954).

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At this crucial point in Iraqi politics, ʿÂdil had emerged as the most important person in the Party. On 11 May 1954, the ICP made contact with the main opposition parties, *al-Istiqlâl*, the National Democratic Party, and other opposition groups and professional associations, in an effort to create a "national front" that would participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled for the following month.

ʿÂdil's wife notes that upon his becoming responsible for the Baghdad section of the Party, one of her husband's first actions was to organize within the army:

> The issue of the Party taking over the reins of power of the government was a central focus of his thoughts and concerns . . . and the main issue [was] the organization of the Party in the army. . . . In the past, the activities of the Party in Baghdad centered around students and youth. . . . [ʿÂdil] strengthened the Party activities in the armed forces, particularly among officers and the lower ranks, and directed . . . that we establish connections with the Army in Baghdad and around Baghdad.[203]

The Iraqi political scene accorded ʿÂdil the environment needed to revive the Party as a viable political force and halt its organizational disintegration. In addition, the rise in Soviet popularity in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948, and strong domestic anti-Western feelings, helped to further strengthen the ICP's role as a credible opposition group. At the same time, successive pro-British Iraqi governments attempted to integrate the country into the Western defence system, in order to secure Western oil supplies and utilize Iraq's geopolitical position in the emerging Cold War. Thus, the West's strategic aim in Iraq became the creation of a Middle East defence system that integrated Iraq into the containment of the Soviet Union. Moving towards that goal, Britain attempted to replace the unequal Anglo-Iraqi and Anglo-Egyptian Treaties of 1930 and 1936, respectively, with a military pact in which the United States would be a partner. In this the British failed, although other arrangements were subsequently advanced for the same purpose of containment. On 21 April 1954, Iraq became a signatory to an Understanding of Military Assistance with the United States, thereby preparing the ground for the Baghdad Pact a year later. This was considered by most of the country's national and progressive forces to be a first step in tying Iraq to the American-sponsored security alliance signed three weeks earlier (2 April 1954) between Turkey and Pakistan. Thus, the ICP, in a circular dated May 1954 entitled "Down with the Pakistan-Turkey Treaty," proclaimed:

> We have no choice except the unity in our national front . . . and to stand up as one people to challenge this treaty, and work for the abolition of the 1930 Treaty, along with the departure of the English occupying armies, the nationalizing of oil companies, the redistribution of land and its irrigation, . . . the increase of the farmer's share [in the tenure system], the abolition of forced labour, the non-involvement of Iraq in any aggressive military project . . . and the establishment of a national government that serves peace and rejects all treaties and imperial military designs.

[203] Thamînah Nâjî Yûsuf and Nazâr Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil: Sirat Munâḍil*, vol. 1 (Cyprus: al-Mada Publishing Company, 2001), p. 80.

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With the signing of the Turkish-Iraqi Mutual Cooperation Pact of 24 February 1955, and the special Iraqi-British agreement of 4 April 1955 that would lead to the Baghdad Pact, the integration of Iraq into the Western alliance became complete, achieving Nûrî al-Saʿîd's goal. The two major nationalist and progressive parties, *al-Istiqlâl* and the National Democratic Party (NDP), reacted to these events by issuing a joint declaration on 30 April 1954 condemning the government and its actions, and they began negotiations with the ICP to discuss the communists' proposed national front. Two weeks later, on 12 May 1954, a temporary national front was formed to coordinate activities for the duration of the forthcoming parliamentary election, thus concretely implementing ʿÂdil's new direction for the ICP. The front agreement was signed by representatives of the NDP and the *Istiqlâl*, and by representatives of youth, lawyer, doctor, student, labour, and peasant organizations, all of which were either controlled or influenced by the communists. However, although the ICP was the principal architect of the National Front, it could not be a co-signatory to its formation, nor could it appear as a partner at the formal announcement of the front, since the Party was an illegal organization and the nationalists were reluctant to be publicly associated with it. The main pillars of the front's pact were

1. A call for democratic freedoms such as the freedom of the press, expression, and assembly, as well as the for right to form political, labour, and professional associations, including political parties.
2. A call for free elections.
3. Abolition of the 1930 treaty; closure of military bases and the departure of foreign armies; and the rejection of imperialist military alliances, including the Turkish-Pakistani Pact.
4. Rejection of military aid programs whose aims are to restrict Iraqi sovereignty and to tie Iraq to imperialist military pacts.
5. Action to abolish foreign monopolies; achieve social justice; abolish feudalism; solve the existing economic crisis, including the problems of unemployment and inflation; raise the standard of living in general; and encourage national industries.[204]

At the end of May 1954, *Al-Qâʿidah*, the primary ICP newspaper, hailed the formation of the front in an editorial, and saluted the victory achieved by the democratic forces. While it expressed chagrin at not being given public acknowledgement for its efforts in building the front, *Al-Qâʿidah* declared that the national front was the only umbrella "that can unify all national and democratic groups against the imperialist forces and the local ruling reactionaries which tie their destiny to that of imperialist control of our country, selling our people's freedom and independence to the British and the Americans." However, it criticized the front for not developing clear positions on anti-imperialism or Arab liberation movements and for limiting "the imperialist forces" to the Americans. In dealing with the eradication of feudalism, the paper also tactfully criticized the front for not specifying the exact form of government it

[204] *Sawt al-Ahâlî* and *Liwâʾal-Istiqlâl* (Baghdad, 13 May 1954).

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sought and for ignoring issuses pertaining to Kurds, women, and political prisoners. It called "for the members of the Front to become more mature, and worthy [of the public's trust] by more clearly articulating national and popular goals, in order to enable the Front to rally all popular forces to the struggle against imperialism, and towards the achievement of independence." Ten days later, perhaps in reaction to the communists' criticisms, as well as to internal debates, the front added two more articles to its pact: "support for all Arab people, in order to achieve the independence of [all] Arab countries, and the liberation of Palestine," and "striving to free Iraq and other Arab countries from the evils of war."[205]

At about the same time, a radical change in the ICP leadership began to take shape when Ḥamîd ʿUthmân took charge of the Party and reorganized the Central Committee, reducing the influence of ʿÂdil and signalling a more orthodox Marxist orientation. The ICP Central Committee at the time was made up of Ḥamîd ʿUthmân, Karîm Aḥmad, Salâm ʿÂdil, Sâlim al-Chalabî, Hâdî Hâshim, Farmân Ṭuʿmâ, ʿAbd-ul-lah ʿUmar Muḥyî-d-Dîn, Nâṣir ʿAbbûd, and ʿAṭshan Ḍaiyyûl. Karîm Aḥmad, ʿUthmân's protégé, replaced ʿÂdil and was put in charge of the Baghdad section, and Muḥyî-d-Dîn was put in charge of the Kurdish section. ʿÂdil was moved to the Middle Euphrates region, and Ṭuʿmâ was put in charge of the south. The acting secretary-general, ʿUthmân, gradually took complete charge of all Party activities and reduced the input of the Central Committee, particularly that of ʿÂdil, giving the Party a new, radical direction through an emphasis on armed struggle.[206]

When the election was held on 9 June 1954, ten National Front candidates were elected – two from the *Istiqlâl* party, six from the NDP, and two former communists. After convening only for the day of its opening, Parliament recessed on 27 July, and Nûrî al-Saʿîd, whose party had won 56 out of the 135 total seats, was called upon to form the government. On 4 August, al-Saʿîd's new government was announced and immediately moved to dissolve Parliament. He also announced the dissolution of his political party, the Constitutional Union, issued an announcement attacking all opposition groups, and called upon the Iraqi people to rally around his government to defend the country from these forces.[207] Immediately thereafter, he revoked the licences of eighteen political newspapers. To further tighten his grip on the country, he issued a number of decrees. On 22 August, in Decree 16, he amended Article 51 of the 1938 Iraqi penal code which mandated seven years imprisonment for anyone who propagated socialist ideas (Bolshevism), communism, or anarchism, or who simply advocated reforming the political system. Nûrî al-Saʿîd's amendment added to that list any organization, such as democratic youth groups, whose aims he believed coincided with those of the communists. On the same day, he also issued Decrees 17 and 18, authorizing the cabinet, upon the recommendation of the minister of the interior, to revoke the citizenship of those

[205] Ibid. (23 May 1954).
[206] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, pp. 87–98.
[207] *Al-Zamân* (Baghdad, 4 August 1954).

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convicted under Article 51. Decree 17 entrusted the minister of the interior with the arrest and deportation of those convicted, and Article 18 closed all labour unions.[208]

Decree 19 followed on 22 September. It authorized the minister of the interior to withdraw the licences of many associations, clubs and theatres, resulting in the closure of some 465 such premises.[209] Two weeks later, on 10 October, Decree 24 authorized the minister of the interior to ban any newspaper or journal.[210] Nûrî al-Saʿîd also gave the minister of the interior, or his designee, the power to disperse any gathering if law and order were threatened.[211] The NDP vehemently attacked Decrees 16, 17, and 18 and demanded their withdrawal declaring:

> We consider these reactionary Decrees issued by this government the worst of any government's action, not only in Iraq but in the world as a whole. . . . Not because it is contrary to the basic principles of democracy and violates the constitution, but because it violated one of the natural human rights of citizens which is the right of citizenship and because it included [and limited] our expression of opinion and political freedoms with vague definitions which allow [the government] free interpretation to oppress any and all political activities. . . . All events prove that oppression, tyranny, suppression of freedoms and the expansion of reactionary decrees will not cure the terrible conditions that create public dissatisfaction and complaints. . . . This, at the end, will awaken the people's consciousness and they will work to eradicate them.[212]

The *Istiqlâl* party issued similar, though less vehement, condemnations.[213]

Immediately after the NDP attacked the decrees its licence was revoked and its paper ceased to publish. The *Istiqlâl* party reacted strongly to the closure, and its editorial entitled "Grave Responsibilities" described the revocation of the NDP's licence as

> expressing the [depths of] despair reached by the ruling group that is trying, without success, to hold onto its privileges in a time when popular mobilization is taking place and people are looking forward to a rapid and fundamental reform. At the same time these groups and their structures are unable to respond to the demanded reforms. They should have tried to reform the corruption under which people are suffering, instead of oppressing the people further. The *Istiqlâl* party knows well the reasons that caused the delicensing of the NDP, and the motives behind this irregular action. . . . the party will shoulder its responsibility fully.[214]

In this environment, the Popular Front Party, in despair, dissolved itself, leaving only the *Istiqlâl* in the public political arena. When the election took place

[208] *Al-Waqâʾiʿ al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, no. 3455 (Baghdad, 14 September 1954).
[209] Al-Ḥasanî, *Târîkh al-Wizârât al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, vol. 9, p. 150; and *Al-Waqâʾiʿ al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, no. 3455 (Baghdad, 14 September 1954).
[210] Ibid., no. 3479 (10 October 1954).
[211] Ibid., no. 3480 (12 October 1954).
[212] *Ṣawt al-Ahâlî* (Baghdad, 2 September 1954).
[213] *Liwâʾ al-Istiqlâl* (Baghdad, 2 September 1954).
[214] Fâʾiq al-Sâmarrâʾî, *Liwâʾ al-Istiqlâl* (Baghdad, 5 September 1954).

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on 12 September 1954, and with other opposition parties also boycotting the election, *Istiqlâl* participated under the same slogans as in the previous election. Nevertheless, as a result of election "irregularities," only two of its members were elected, while Nûrî al-Saʿîd's group won a landslide victory, taking all the remaining seats. One hundred and twenty-one seats were won by acclamation, and the other twelve were only weakly contested.[215]

In response to these results, the *Istiqlâl* party decided to withdraw from the parliament, though one member chose to stay on as an independent after resigning from the party. On 22 September 1954, and in accordance with Decree 19, the party was also de-licensed.[216] Confronted by Nûrî al-Saʿîd's oppression and indiscriminate attack on public freedoms, the Communist Party repeated its call for continuation of the national front, using the success of the 9 June 1954 election and the election of ten members to Parliament as evidence that "it was a successful experiment for any national grouping . . . and a practical justification for forming a united national front later on."[217]

Nûrî al-Saʿîd's repression of the political opposition backfired in that the ICP emerged with greatly increased popularity. A cardinal principle of the ICP's strategy at this time seemed to centre on collective political action through a national front to stop Nûrî al-Saʿîd from steering Iraq towards joining in the Turkish-Pakistani Pact for Friendship and Co-operation for Security. To prepare for this move, Nûrî al-Saʿîd broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in January 1955. The Central Committee of the ICP responded with a memorandum, addressed to all national parties and forces, in which it explained the break with the Soviet Union as a realignment of Iraq in preparation for the security pact. The ICP declared:

> The resumption of diplomatic relations with the USSR is of utmost national necessity, dictated by the [defence] of the country's reputation and the nation's honour. . . . the break with the Soviet Union means Iraq became one of America's client states. . . . the Central Committee calls upon all brothers in the other political parties, and all those opposition personalities, to show their solidarity. Our Party believes that one simple common action uniting us all together will shake up the government. . . . we must make a collective response.[218]

Al-Qâʿidah continued its call for a national front as the only alternative framework for opposition to Nûrî al-Saʿîd and again pointed out that the temporary national front of May 1954 should have been developed further and become permanent. If "the parliamentary bloc had been able to transform itself into a supreme body for the National Front," argued *Al-Qâʿidah*, "it would not have been so easy for Nûrî al-Saʿîd to dissolve the parliament. And even if he had dissolved parliament and the bloc, if the Front had been transformed, it would have had the solid legitimacy of a national organization." As, the Party

[215] Al-Ḥasanî, *Târîkh al-Wizârât al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, vol. 9, p. 181.
[216] *Al-Waqâʾiʿ al-ʿIrâqiyyah*, no. 2473 (29 September, 1954).
[217] *Al-Qâʿidah* (10 June 1954).
[218] Ibid. (mid-January 1955).

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asserted in an editorial: "Had it not been for these mistakes, the reactionary forces would not have been able to dismantle the Front, and the step of 12 May 1954 [formation of the National Front] would have become the nucleus of a broad democratic front, which would have been able to steer the direction of politics towards a nationalist and independent policy."[219]

As expected, on 24 February 1955 Iraq joined the Turkish-Pakistani Pact; this move was immediately ratified by the parliament led by Nûrî al-Saʿîd. *Al-Qâʿidah* reacted by declaring:

> Division among the Arabs will be the first fruit of this pact. The Iraqi-Turkish pact is directed clearly against the peace-loving Afro-Asian nations, and against the unity of the Arab people struggling for independence, peace, and progress. At the same time it is also directed against the Kurdish people, who arose courageously to challenge imperial and feudal serfdom . . . in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.[220]

The next day, the ICP, along with the nationalist forces, played a leading role in mobilizing public demonstrations against the pact in the major cities of Iraq. Scores of citizens were arrested, and a number were killed. A week later, on 3 April, Iraq and Britain signed a special agreement to replace the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, and on 5 April Britain joined the Iraqi-Turkish-Pakistani Pact.

In response to there being no formal structure uniting progressive and nationalist forces, ʿUthmân sternly criticized opposition groups and parties, chastising them for not supporting the Party's call for a "common action" against the government. He claimed that the ICP had "asked the interested parties to organize a general political strike to destabilize the Cabinet [of Nûrî al-Saʿîd]; however, we have not received any response from our brethren."[221] ʿUthmân issued this call without consulting anyone else in the Party.

Soon after, again on his own, and without any discussion in the Central Committee or the Politburo, or with any of the Party's partners in the National Front, though nominally under the signatures of the Central Committee, ʿUthmân published an exceptionally radical action programme in *Al-Qâʿidah*. In doing so, he committed the ICP to a strategy and programme that would have significant ramifications for both the Party and the country. He unilaterally stated that as "our Party does not know retreat in the face of challenge, we now offer the required national programme which expresses the interest of the overwhelming majority of the people, based on the internal, national situation, and in the pressing national interests of [the people]." He challenged the opposition forces to act by declaring, "We extend the hand of real struggle to every Iraqi who will stand to implement [the total] programme, or any part of it, even any of its sections or articles."[222] ʿUthmân proposed in this programme, which came to be known as "The Cry of May," that all nationalist forces unite around the following objectives: (1) the withdrawal of Iraq from the Turkish-Pakistani

[219] Ibid. (mid-February 1955).
[220] Ibid. (early March 1955).
[221] Ibid. (mid-January 1955).
[222] Ibid. (May 1955).

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Pact; (2) the repudiation of the April Anglo-Iraqi Treaty; (3) the rejection of all American assistance programmes, military or otherwise; (4) the cancellation of all foreign monopolies, including oil concessions; and (5) the overthrow of Nûrî al-Saʿîd's government and the installation of a national coalition government dedicated to the creation of a democratic environment, the freeing of all political prisoners, the dissolution of the present parliament, and the free election of a new parliament in which women and minorities would have better representation. In addition, the proposed government would improve the health and the cultural and living conditions of the people. The final objective of ʿUthmân's programme was (6) the reform of the state structure, especially the police, the judiciary, and the army.[223]

At this time, the ICP's popularity increased, and the Party was emboldened to become active in new areas. It moved to organize within the Iraqi armed forces, creating the National Committee for the Union of Officers and Soldiers, with its own newspaper, *Ḥurriyyat al-Waṭan* (The Liberation of the Motherland). The paper's first issue, published in January 1955, declared:

> The Iraqi soldiers should not be treated as slaves, driven to war without a choice, and exploited as servants in officers' homes – we must have a unity of aim and organization – our immediate duty is to work in order to spread national consciousness, to strengthen the spirit of patriotic devotion and the hatred of imperialism. . . . we must struggle against mistreatment of soldiers, work to prohibit . . . inhumane treatment of them, and strive towards the improvement of the soldiers' standard of living and education. We must also endeavour to provide schools to raise the technical level of the soldiers . . . and the unlimited privileges of officers should be terminated.

According to the second issue, in February 1955, "Soldiers are human beings like other Iraqi people and should have rights and opinions. . . . we are not serfs. . . . the national committee calls upon you [soldiers] to join the people in their demonstrations, wearing your military uniforms so that the enemies of the people will know that the nation's workers and soldiers are united." Around this time also, the Committee of the Workers' Organization became more vocal and active; it regularly published *Ittiḥâd al-ʿUmmâl* (The Unity of Workers), its official organ, in which it called for the right of workers to organize into labour unions, carried news of workers' activities in general, and highlighted workers' strikes and grievances. Subsequently, the Party newspaper, *Al-Qâʿidah*, intensified its coverage of the peasant movement, stressing the need to form peasant organizations.

Incensed by the radicalization of the Party and the personal conduct of the secretary-general, ʿÂdil refused to abide by "The Cry of May" policy or to distribute *Al-Qâʿidah* that contained it. He also wrote to ask that the Central Committee convene to debate this "Party" policy.[224] Other members of the Central Committee, likewise alarmed by Ḥamîd ʿUthmân's extremism, isolation from other national progressive forces, and dictatorial style, also called for

[223] Ibid. (May 1955).

[224] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, pp. 99–101.

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an assessment of ʿUthmân's leadership. In an extraordinary meeting in June 1955, the Central Committee decided to remove ʿUthmân from the secretary-generalship and place him under forced detention. He was expelled from his post on 19 July and warned that if he did not submit to the leadership, he would no longer be under the "protection" of the ICP.[225]

Following this action, the ICP experienced yet another change in direction, characterized by greater emphasis on peaceful activities through the formation of popular groups, such as a separate women's party section, intended to satisfy cultural norms rather than ideological positions. The Party also created the Committee of Democratic Activities to foster creation of professional and popular organizations to work within the Iraqi political environment. The Central Committee placed responsibility for the Party's isolation and adventurist policies directly on ʿUthmân and roundly condemned his dictatorial style, which had ignored Party by-laws, violated the basic principles of democratic centralism, and encouraged the rise of a personality cult. They also censured ʿUthmân's tactics vis-à-vis other democratic forces. Finally, the Central Committee elected ʿÂdil secretary-general, and authorized him to put into action a new vision for the Party's future, involving a restructuring of the Party and a broadening of the Party's collaboration with workers' unions and peasant organizations rather than merely seeking to integrate those associations into the Party structure. The Party also opened itself to full cooperation with other political forces in order to "struggle for democratic freedoms that will never bear fruit without the involvement of the popular masses in a struggle for their immediate and vital interests."[226]

Nasser's Pan-Arabist Challenge

Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1952 coup in Egypt opened the floodgates of revolution in the Arab world, and by the mid-1950s the region was awash with change. It was in this context that ʿÂdil rose to power in the Party leadership, assuming the post of secretary-general in July 1955, just prior to Nasser's ascent to prominence in the Arab nationalist movement, his increasing anti-Western orientation, and his close cooperation with the socialist bloc.

In early 1955, the Western-engineered Baghdad Pact promoted by Nûrî al-Saʿîd presented a major challenge to Nasser's Pan-Arab policy and was the catalyst for his anti-imperialist stance. To counter the pact, Nasser attempted to form his own defence alliance, and in March 1955, Egypt and Syria formed the "Defence Organization and Mutual Arab Cooperative to establish a permanent common command [structure] to execute defence, and supervise the war industry and economic cooperation."[227] Yemen declared its support,[228]

[225] Ṣalâḥ al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shîyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq* (Beirut: Dâr al-Furât, 1993), pp. 76, 77; and *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (26 January 1960).

[226] Central Committee Party Minutes and Pronouncements, ICP, August 1955.

[227] *Al-Ahram* (Cairo, 7 March 1955).

[228] Ibid. (7 March 1955).

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and a day later Saudi Arabia endorsed the agreement.[229] *Al-Ahram* described the purpose, scope, and nature of the alliance:

> What Egypt and Syria seek is the complete integration of the Arab world. . . . Politically the Arab world ignores the Iraqi-Turkish pact or any other non-Arab pact. Militarily the new Arab world should have an organization which takes care of its defence. . . . Economically . . . an Arab economic council will be formed to direct the economic policy.[230]

By mid-1955 it was apparent that Nasser had failed to rally sufficient Arab state support for the proposed Arab Mutual Security Pact, which drove a further wedge between him and the governments concerned. Personality conflicts and policy clashes between Nasser and the other Arab leaders, particularly Nûrî al-Saʿîd, intensified. Furthermore, Nasser's active opposition to the Baghdad Pact paved the way for a breach with the West. With the Bandung Conference in April 1955, this confrontation intensified, pushing Nasser to the forefront of the Arab nationalist movement. When he signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia on 17 September 1955, it ended the Western monopoly on arms sales to the region, was the start of closer Egyptian cooperation with the Soviet bloc, and deepened the gulfs between Nasser and the Pan-Arab nationalist movement, and Nasser and the West. Nine months later, the Suez Canal crisis, initiated by Egypt's nationalization of the canal on 26 July, led to an Israeli-French-British attack on Egypt on 29 October. Soviet and Chinese support for Egypt cemented Nasser's role as leader of the Pan-Arab nationalist movement and propelled the Egyptian leader to prominence on the international stage. In addition, these events increased Soviet popularity throughout the Arab world, heightened support for all anti-Western forces in the region, and brought about closer communication, if not outright cooperation, between Arab nationalists and the left in the Arab world. Thus, the crisis cemented the front among all anti-imperialist forces against the West, their common enemy.

Rebuilding the Party

It is within this fluid and dynamic environment that ʿÂdil's rise to power and his success in bringing the fractured Party together and leading it to become a significant actor in Iraqi politics and in the anti-imperialist front against Nûrî al-Saʿîd must be understood. Immediately after assuming the position of secretary-general of the Party, and in a gesture of goodwill to other opposition groupings, particularly the nationalists, Salâm ʿÂdil and his Central Committee pledged their support for his long-held position on formation of a national front.[231] ʿÂdil confided to his wife that "his new platform would be the unification of the Party, the reintegration of all splinter groups and the formation of a national front."[232]

[229] Ibid. (8 March 1955).
[230] Ibid. (Cairo, 10 March 1955).
[231] For more detail on ʿÂdil's account, see Yûsuf and Khâlid, vol. 1, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, pp. 99–101.
[232] Ibid., p. 102.

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In this environment, ʿÂdil turned his attention to attracting all the splinter groups into the "mother party." He initiated these activities by establishing links with dissident communist groups, suggesting that they reunite since "none of them is strong enough to be viable on its own, and now that the Party has acceptance within the Iraqi political scene we can have our imprint on the political life of the country."[233] One of ʿÂdil's first tasks was to rebuild the Party by raising the standard of the intellectual and theoretical education of the cadres. To accomplish this, he published a special issue of *Al-Qâʿidah* (number 8), at the end of 1955, devoted entirely to this purpose.

On 22 July 1955, only two weeks into his new post, the ICP's new secretary-general moved to attract the most popular splinter communist organization, *Râyat al-Shaghîlah*: he presented it with a four-point plan to discuss and to serve as a basis for possible reunification.[234] *Râyat al-Shaghîlah* initially responded with caution, declaring, "unity will no doubt have to be achieved and the slogan of the 'unity of principles' is becoming a reality." Moreover, its attacks on *al-Qâʿidah* did not cease.[235] In March 1956, *Al-Qâʿidah* appealed to all splinter groups to unite in one communist party, claiming that "*Râyat al-Shaghîlah* does not have any good reason to continue its opposition" to the *al-Qâʿidah* group, especially after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956. Immediately after the dissolution of the Cominform on 17 April 1956, the group the Unity of the Communists in Iraq also dissolved itself and amalgamated with the ICP, with one of its leaders, ʿAbd-ul-Raḥîm Sharîf, being appointed to the Party's Central Committee. This paved the way for *Râyat al-Shaghîlah*'s eventual return after long negotiations between the two groups, mediated by the Syrian Communist Party and its leader, Khâlid Bakdâsh. Thus, in the middle of June 1956, the final issue of *Râyat al-Shaghîlah* declared the group dissolved and even criticized itself as having been divisive to the unity of the communist movement. Following this, in a circular dated 17 June 1956, the ICP's Central Committee criticized the actions taken in 1952 by the Bâsim Central Committee in expelling the *Râyat al-Shaghîlah* group, and described the expulsion as "childish and bureaucratic." It was a time when

> an ignorant leadership achieved control over the affairs of the Party . . . which resulted in repeated grave political and organizational mistakes that led to the Party being deprived of the experience and knowledge of faithful comrades who [had] sincerely criticized the Party, and were consequently and unjustly expelled because of the suppression of criticism by the then party leadership, later forcing these comrades to join *Râyat al-Shaghîlah*.[236]

To show its new direction and good faith, the ICP leadership decided to replace the Party's newspaper, and *Al-Qâʿidah* declared its 19 June 1956 issue to be its last. Party members and friends were called on to help choose a suitable

[233] Interview by author with George Tallû, Baghdad (18 March 1959).
[234] *Al-Qâʿidah*, no. 11 (December 1955).
[235] *Râyat al-Shaghîlah* (28 October 1955).
[236] For more details, and for the views of ʿÂdil, see *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (Baghdad, 26 January 1960).

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name for the new Party newspaper, and *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (Unity of the People) was issued on 22 July 1956, signalling a new era for the reborn ICP. Confident of Party unity and in its increasing presence on the Iraqi political scene, the ICP made preparations for a second Party conference, the first to be held since the execution of its founder Fahd; the conference took place in September 1956, at the height of the Suez crisis. During the Second Party Conference, the advanced Party and local committees were fully represented, and the secretary-general's draft report was closely scrutinized and discussed before it was unanimously approved.

In the report entitled "Our Political Plan for our National and Patriotic Liberation," Salâm ʿÂdil presented the Party's new direction and policy orientation to the conference. Essentially, it summarised what he had been putting into practice from the time he assumed the Party's top post, and for which he now sought formal sanction from the entire cadre. He laid out his basic platform, to some extent incorporating changes introduced by resolutions of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU that brought principles of co-existence into international relations. He also inserted his own moderate views, which had evolved over the past two years, into the programme, emphasizing not the Marxist-Leninist principle of a revolutionary transformation to socialism, but "the current imperative [which is] the creation of a national government whose most important obligations . . . are to put an end to its isolation from its sister Arab states and to follow an Arab national policy which guarantees Iraq the honour of participating in Arab alliances, and in the noble efforts to achieve the aspired Arab unity." He added:

> What faces our country now is the need to transform the existing policy of cooperation with imperialism, compromise with Zionism, and isolation from the national liberation movement to an Arab nationalist policy. The nature of the approaching battle . . . must be peaceful . . . based on the mobilization of nationalist forces in a broad front to change the existing policy to an independent, nationalist Arab policy.[237]

He then went on to explain that "the task of the transition to socialism and the transfer of political power to the hands of workers, peasants and their allies, is not the task that faces the Party under current conditions."[238] Further, the report clarified the basic aims of the Party at this particular stage of Iraq's history, and it emphasized that the way to the achievement of this change would be through cooperation with other national forces by peaceful means and through the formation of a national front coalition government, even though the Communist Party might not be represented in that government.[239]

While the Party did not advocate revolution, it did not rule out the possibility of a popular uprising to create a national government that would steer Iraqi

[237] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb*, no. 9 (mid-October 1956), and ICP, *Khuṭaṭunâ al-Siyâsiyyah fî Sabîl al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanî wa al-Qawmî* (Baghdad: ICP, 1956), p. 23.
[238] ICP, *Khuṭaṭunâ al-Siyâsiyyah fî Sabîl al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanî wa al-Qawmî*, p. 24.
[239] Ibid. p. 34.

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politics towards a more "independent nationalist Arab" policy. Thus, while it advocated change through peaceful means and was "anxious to achieve its aim constitutionally, with the lowest cost, and a minimum of human sacrifice,"[240] it did not rule out a possible uprising in the face of government violence. The report described the tasks of the national front government it envisioned as the establishment of an independent foreign policy that would include withdrawal from military agreements with the West, the immediate annulment of the Baghdad Pact, and the encouragement of an Arab cooperation policy that could lead to Arab unity. On the domestic level, it called for democratization through the repeal of all laws limiting basic human freedom implementation of the constitution, an independent economic policy that would protect the national economy and improve the living conditions of the population, and limitation of the powers of foreign oil companies to secure Iraqi interests rather than those of the petroleum companies through renegotiation of profit-sharing arrangements.[241]

Since the national front was to be the cornerstone of the Party's future activities, a significant proportion of the report was devoted to the front's nature, scope, and form.[242] It described the front as a coalition of all political forces having the common denominator of consensus on major issues, including a commitment to replacing the oppressive regime, while allowing

> each member of the front to exercise its own activities . . . while working independently to achieve their own aims through their own specific methods and forms [as they see fit], as long as these do not infringe upon the basic general struggle. . . . To act as if we are alone in the field, and we alone have the right to lead, is erroneous and a clear violation of the fact that all national forces are united in one front, and not in one party. We should not overburden the front with aims, ideologies, or approaches that may be in contradiction to the class nature of the parties.[243]

The report also devoted extensive space to the Arab national movement and the Kurdish question, in which it asserted that Iraq was an Arab country and that its people were part of the "Arab nation." Nevertheless, the report observed that there existed two major nationalities, Kurdish and Arab, both of which were struggling to achieve independence and liberation "from imperialism." Securing the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan would allow liberation and Arab unity but, at the same time, would pave the way for genuine Kurdish self-determination and the eventual possibility of an independent Kurdish state.[244] With this part of the report, ʿÂdil brought the Party into line with the burning issues of the Arab national movement and closer in orientation to the nationalist groupings.

Also at the conference a new Central Committee was chosen, the Politburo being composed of Salâm ʿÂdil, first secretary of the Central Committee;

[240] Ibid., p. 31.
[241] Ibid, pp. 31–36.
[242] Ibid, pp. 36–48.
[243] Ibid., p. 45.
[244] Ibid., pp. 49–60.

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ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah; and Jamâl al Ḥaidarî. The rest of the Central Committee was made up of Nâṣir ᶜAbbûd, ᶜAṭshân Khaiyyûn al-Izzarjâwî, Farḥân Ṭuᶜmâ, Muḥammad Ṣâliḥ al-ᶜAblî and ᶜAbd-ul-Raḥîm Sharîf, with ᶜAzîz Aḥmad al-Shaikh and Ṣâliḥ Mahdî Duglah as Central Committee candidates.[245]

However, this re-shuffling did not go down well with a number of Party veterans, who viewed the conference as a deviation from socialism, let alone Marxist-Leninist principles. According to Hesqal Kojaman, a deeply committed communist who was imprisoned from 1949 to 1958 and again from 1959 to 1962, after which he left Iraq to live in London, the conference was the first betrayal of Fahd's Marxist-Leninist principles, and he saw the ICP shifting towards a moderation unworthy of the name communist party.[246] Kojaman concluded that the Party was becoming a mere reformist party rather than a revolutionary Marxist one that had found accommodation with the ruling elites and the royal regime "to achieve socialism in gradual stages; [the first of which is] the establishment of honest national government that allows the people the chance to march gradually and peacefully, under the leadership of the working class, towards socialism."[247]

Some observers have argued that the ICP never really recovered from the loss of its leaders in 1949. Fahd's leadership qualities were difficult to equal, and even his rivals acknowledged his tremendous intellectual strength. In the words of Mâlik Saif, to whom Fahd left control of the Party during his imprisonment, and who later turned most of the organization over to Iraqi security forces:

> I can say that Yûsuf Salmân Yûsuf (Fahd) was the only Iraqi Marxist-Leninist, not only because he studied at the "Toilers of the East" University, but also because he was able to adapt Marxism-Leninism to fit Iraqi social conditions in that period. He made communism attractive to a lot of people, including those within the petit-bourgeoisie, and sons of the upper classes and ministers, while widening the popular base of the Party to the degree that he was able to dispel the image of communism as atheistic. This allowed the Party the opportunity to convert clerics and their sons.[248]

An example of the strength of Fahd's personal influence was the admission into the Party of Mullah Sharîf ᶜUthmân – the "Red Mullah." ᶜUthmân was elected to the Central Committee at the First Congress, and put in charge of the Party's Kurdish branch, which at the time was almost non-existent. By mid-1946, however, the Kurdish branch was flourishing and published a Kurdish-language newspaper called *Azadi* (Freedom). But with Fahd's arrest in 1947, Sharîf ᶜUthmân abandoned all the work he had done and resigned, saying that Fahd had been the source of his loyalty and inspiration.[249]

Hesqal Kojaman made similar claims regarding Fahd's influence. In his eyes, the leaders who succeeded Fahd never reached the intellectual and theoretical

[245] Al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shîyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, p. 81.
[246] Hesqal Kojaman, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ᶜIrâq wa siyâsât al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûᶜî* (London: n.p., 1985), pp. 40–54.
[247] Ibid., pp. 179–80.
[248] *Lil-Târîkh Lisân* (Baghdad: Ḥurriyah Press, 1983), pp. 67–68.
[249] Ibid., pp. 179–80.

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levels or the revolutionary sophistication that would enable them to take mature political stands; in addition, the majority of the active members knowledgeable about Marxist theory had been arrested and imprisoned. Thus, according to Kojaman, those leaders left outside prison were the most inexperienced and least equipped to guide the Party; moreover, the leadership in prison failed to improve their understanding of Marxism.

> As far as I know, [between 1949 and 1958,] while we were in prison, nobody from the cadre can deny the impoverished understanding of Marxist thought, which was maintained by the prison leadership [after Fahd's execution]. After the three executions (Fahd, Ḥâzim, and Ṣârim), successive weak prison leadership suffered from the same [intellectual stagnation] which was inflicted on the Party outside. . . . The [inexperienced and theoretically weak] communist leadership that was charged to rebuild the Party, and revitalize its activities outside, became the leadership in prison once they [too] were arrested. [After the new leadership] was imprisoned, they continued to be naïve and uneducated [in a Marxist sense], despite their urging new recruits to educate themselves in Marxist theory.

According to Kojaman, only four members of the Party – himself, ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj, Zakî Khairî, and Ibrâhîm Shâʾûl – had the intellectual facility and Marxist understanding necessary to render decisions about the Party from the proper theoretical perspective. Immediately after their release from prison following the 14 July 1958 coup, this divergent group assumed the leadership of the Party, composing the Central Committee and the Party Politburo.[250]

To deal on the organizational level with the Party's new amalgamation with the splinter groups, the Second Party Conference in 1956 paid special attention to the principle of "democratic centralism" and emphasized the need for Party discipline. In assessing the conference, one of the semi-official historians of the ICP, Suʿâd Khairî notes:

> The Conference was a testament to the Party's success in strengthening its unity, ridding itself of all schisms, . . . uniting the leadership and cadre, solidifying the party intellectually and politically, freeing itself from its national isolation, and strengthening its ties to the international communist movement . . . [as well as] responding to the new needs of our Iraqi people's national liberation movement and meeting the challenge of the rising Arab liberation movement as a whole. The situation demanded that the Party take into account these new objectives. To effectively augment its role in the national Iraqi liberation, it proclaimed slogans that would unify all opposition forces including Iraqi patriotic and national elements, and Kurdish and minority groups in a united national front . . . for the purpose of solidifying the struggle to achieve the formation of a national government.[251]

The ICP leadership under ʿÂdil was anxious to integrate its activities with other nationalist forces. As a result, in its acceptance of non-violent means for achieving its political aims, its approach was highly pragmatic. According

[250] Kojaman, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ʿIrâq wa siyâsât al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî*, pp. 96–98.
[251] Suʿâd Khaîrî, *Min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Thawriyyah al-Muʿâṣirah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 273.

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to some observers, it had clearly abandoned the principle of class struggle and submitted to the nationalist bourgeoisie. This prompted Suʿâd Khaîrî to criticize the conference resolutions as tantamount to a betrayal of Party principles:

> The Second Conference did not elaborate or delineate its vision [of the nature of the government] after the achievement of the national revolution because it did not envisage the necessity of the Communist Party's participation in this national government. Nor did it define the leading role of the working class in developing the national democratic revolution, which the national bourgeoisie is unable and unfit to fulfil because of its class make-up. This makes the bourgeoisie unable to achieve the complete objective of national liberation, in addition to its opposition to the transformation to the next stage, [which is] socialism.[252]

To implement the conference resolutions, the Party intensified the efforts it had initiated even before the conference to build the national front. In the spring of 1955, the Party had made formal representation to the NDP and progressive leftist groupings regarding the possibility of cooperation in preparation for such a national front.[253] Conditions in 1956 were ripe for the realization of the ICP's Second Conference resolutions on both Arab and national levels. Gradually, a loose committee, without any specific strategy, came into being, whose purpose was simply to discuss possible conditions for some sort of coordination, at least on basic political issues. However, the political situation in the Arab world generally, and in Iraq in particular, deteriorated, with events moving so rapidly that the various groupings, particularly the NDP, were induced to work more closely together. Even the *Istiqlâl* party gradually considered the idea of cooperation among all the leftist political parties, including the ICP, despite its previous reluctance to interact with leftists and communists. The NDP did not fully share such sensitivity. Indeed, relations between *al-Istiqlâl* and the NDP became so close that on 16 June 1956 they jointly applied to the government for a licence to form a new amalgamated party under the name *Ḥizb al-Muʾtamar al-Waṭanî* (the National Congress Party). This application was denied, prompting the Communist Party's official newspaper to vow that "the national and democratic forces will continue the struggle to remedy the political life of the country, and enforce the right of political organization for all political parties as one of the natural rights of any people, despite differences in their approaches and ideologies, [indeed,] as one of the natural rights of any nation."[254]

Strikes and public unrest ensued, culminating with the ICP, the newly emerging Arab Baʿth Socialist Party, and the leadership of the proposed National Congress Party jointly calling for national strikes in support of Egypt's resistance to Western pressures and threats. The strike was timed to coincide with the holding of the London Conference of 16 August 1956, which was supposed to coordinate the West's response to Nasser's nationalization of the Suez

[252] Ibid., pp. 273, 274.
[253] Ibid., p. 278.
[254] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (22 July 1956).

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Canal.[255] The ICP supported the strike, and in a 13 August pronouncement entitled "The ICP Calls the Iraqi People to a General Strike in Solidarity with the Arab People in Support of Egypt," declared:

> Let us respond to the call of the Arab Central Committee, which was formed by all the political parties and forces in Syria, to make 16 August the day of a total and comprehensive strike. . . . let us unite all parties and national forces for this sacred occasion in a decisive response to the popular will . . . to force the government to assent to the will of the people, and declare publicly that Iraq is [in solidarity] with Egypt . . . and with Arabism against imperialism. Let the government take serious political and economic measures against the imperial states that are threatening aggression against Egypt. . . . let us get our country out of the Baghdad Pact, the cause of the division among Arabs . . . let us plan an honourable direction for our country . . . a patriotic Arab independent direction.[256]

Now in good standing with Arab nationalist forces on the Iraqi scene, ᶜÂdil turned his attention to strengthening the ICP's relations with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and to negotiations to coordinate activities between the Kurdish branch of the ICP and the KDP. However, the KDP rejected anything other than the dissolution of the ICP's Kurdish branch and its complete integration into the KDP. The majority of the ICP's Kurdish branch eventually chose to join the KDP in June 1957. The secretary-general responded in August, in the name of the ICP, by issuing the pamphlet *A Response to Bourgeois Chauvinist Dismantlers*,[257] which asserted that members of the ICP leadership had, without authorization from the Central Committee or approval by the Kurdish branch leadership, negotiated a merger with the KDP that the Central Committee rejected because the plan had

> no ideological, political or social basis. . . . it is an opportunist unity at the expense of the Iraqi people, including the Kurdish people, and the communist Party. . . . instead of the leadership of our branch in Kurdistan standing firm and candidly against this bourgeois, chauvinist, dismantler, deviationist group, it submitted to the [group], and approved the majority of opinions and conclusions of this deviating body.[258]

The pamphlet went on to state that the KDP "is not a Marxist-Leninist organization but rather a bourgeois chauvinist [group]."[259] By the autumn of 1956, the Iraqi situation was approaching a boiling point; moreover, public support for the four-year-old Algerian revolution was reaching its peak. Arab issues became paramount for all Iraqi nationalist and progressive forces, including

[255] Kâmil al-Châdirchî, *Mudhakkarât Kâmil al-Châdirchî wa Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanî al-Dîmuqrâṭi* (Beirut: Dar al-Ṭalîᶜah, 1970), p. 676; and Laith ᶜAbd-ul-Ḥasan al-Zubaidî, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ᶜIrâq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture, Rashîd Publishing House, 1979), p. 100.

[256] ᶜAzîz al-Shaikh, *Jabhat al-Ittiḥâd al-Waṭanî wa al-Mahâm al-Târîkhiyyah al-Mulqât ᶜAlâ ᶜÂtiqihâ fî al-Ẓarf al-Râhin* (Baghdad: al-Nûr Bookshop, 1959), p. 12.

[257] Reproduced in Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ᶜÂdil*, pp. 339–389.

[258] Ibid., p. 341.

[259] Ibid., p. 345.

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the communists, and, as a result, organizational issues like the Party's conflict with the KDP became secondary.

The major cities in Iraq responded fully to the call to strike, and with teachers and students at the forefront, confrontations with the police ensued. *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* declared in September 1956 that "the success of the strike proved that national unity is the only means to abort imperialists and their agents' plots." With the Israeli, French, and British Tripartite aggression against Egypt in November 1956, there was an upsurge in public activity and protest throughout Iraq, with large masses of people taking to the streets spontaneously and demonstrating in support of Egypt. Unrest spread out from Baghdad in a ripple effect and quickly engulfed the entire country. From the northern cities of Mosul, Irbil, and Sulaimaniyah to the southern cities of Basra and Najaf the demonstrators confronted the government. In al-Hayy, 225 kilometres southeast of Baghdad, a full-blown armed confrontation against the government materialized. The ICP played a leading role in this confrontation, and as a result, the Party leadership in al-Hayy was arrested and eventually executed. At the same time, Baghdad was seething with discontent, and student demonstrators filled the streets. Martial law was declared, schools and universities were closed, and sixty professors and two college deans were removed from their posts and arrested. The head of the Chamber of Commerce was also detained, and numerous personages were imprisoned, including the chairmen of the banned nationalist and leftist political parties and organizations. The most severe prison sentence, three years in jail, was reserved for Kâmil al-Châdirchî, the chairman of the NDP. This situation demanded improved coordination among the leader of the Iraqi opposition political scene. From the first day of the Tripartite aggression, the four nationalist and progressive parties – the Baʿth, the ICP, the *al-Istiqlâl*, and the NDP, along with independent nationalist personalities – sought to initiate a more coordinated and structured opposition effort, resulting in the formation of an ad hoc frontline leadership group to direct all spontaneous popular activities.[260]

On 1 May 1957, the Party published a special report written by ʿÂdil on behalf of the Politburo. This report, "The Uprising of 1956 and Our Responsibilities in the Current Conditions,"[261] was basically the result of the deliberations at the Central Committee meeting in February evaluating the Party's involvement in the events of 1956. It lamented the fact that the uprising would have brought more positive results if the national forces had been able to unite more aggressively and better coordinate their activities, and if they had been integrated within a formal national front. As a first step towards that end, the report attempted to bridge the gap between communist and nationalist forces through an unequivocal recognition of the connection between Arab nationalism and Iraqi liberation. Indeed, the ICP's failure to see the relationship between the two had been the basic reason for the rift between the communists and

[260] Al-Shaikh, *Jabhat al-Ittiḥad al-Waṭanî wa al-Mahâm al-Târîkhiyyah al-Mulqât ʿAlâ ʿÂtiqihâ fî al-Ẓarf al-Râhin*, p. 12.

[261] Reproduced in Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, pp. 391–451.

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nationalists over the past decade. Furthermore, the Party accepted the special position of Nasser in the forefront of the Arab struggle against imperialism, acknowledging

his heroic role in combating colonialism and its allies, and his leadership of the Arab liberation sovereignty [movement]. For the first time in centuries, the Arab liberation movement appeared to have a degree of vitality, power and unity of direction. For the sake of expelling imperialism from the Arab world, and for the sake of defending [it] against imperialist aggression and conspiracies, the united Arab countries resorted to Arab defence alliances, [and] cultural, economic, and political pacts, in addition to holding conferences to unify their political positions and coordinate their efforts . . . to liberate the Arab world and unify the Arab nation.[262]

The report emphasized the "organic" connection between the Iraqi national movement, the "Arab liberation" and "unity" movements the special role of Egypt, and "the personification of Arab liberation aims [in Egypt] where the main material and organic power resides. . . . The main content of the [1956] uprising is the amalgamation of the policy of Arab liberation led by big sister Egypt, as the only historic route to liberate the Iraqi people."[263] The report went on to say that the events of 1956 took place within

. . . a decisive battle between the Arab nations and their allies and imperialism. The battle took place in local Arab and international circumstances that forced the Iraqi people to confront the need for a fundamental struggle to transform [Iraqi politics] . . . The latest peoples' uprising [1956] carried with it significant and comprehensive objectives for liberation, and clashed with the imperial policy in historic conditions, as any retreat [by the imperialists] in the face of the overwhelming power of the Arab Liberation movement would lead inevitably to deaths, disasters, and ultimately, a debacle for imperialism.[264]

The analysis continued, emphasizing the crucial strategic position of Iraq in the regional and international milieu for both the colonialist and the nationalist camps. The report noted that Iraq was the only country incorporated into the Western alliances, and the only country still associated with colonial power through its membership in the Baghdad Pact. In addition, Iraq was strategically positioned "close to the Soviet Union" and could be "transformed into a base to attack the Soviet Union."[265] Thus, according to the report, the Iraqi national movement was key in the battle against imperialism in the Arab world. But because it was led mainly by students, the intelligentsia, and professionals, the Iraqi national movement did not attract the participation of the majority of

decisive forces of peasants and workers. In addition, it did not attract the Kurdish masses. If these forces had entered the struggle, the balance would have tipped in favour of the national movement. . . . While the students and the intelligentsia are not the main forces in the country, their comparatively small forces will not be able to resolve the question

[262] Ibid., p. 396.
[263] Ibid., p. 400.
[264] Ibid., pp. 402, 403.
[265] Ibid., p. 404.

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of national liberation, no matter how passionate, committed, and courageous they may be. The main forces that can truly prevail and carry that great task are that force made up of millions of peasants and workers. . . . We know that the uprising did not attract enough peasants and workers to its ranks. Thus, there is no doubt that it would have been impossible for the forces that did participate in the uprising . . . to settle the problem of national liberation and direct the country toward the path of Arab liberation.[266]

The report outlined the reasons for this failure to attract the masses of workers and peasants as

neglect by the Party of both the problems of the peasants and workers, as well as the need to actively organize among these masses. As such, we need to enlarge our Party base among the peasants and workers, and create national labour organizations. For that we are in need of larger numbers of [cadre] who will propagate [the Party's ideas] and carry our voice, slogans, and path to the thousands of workers and peasants.

The Party saw this as the most important lesson to be learned from the uprising. On Kurdish non-involvement, the report pointed out that the Arab liberation movement concentrated on Arab issues and paid less attention to the issues pertaining to other national minorities living in the Arab world.[267] The report also admitted that "the uprising of 1956 could have had much more positive results on the Iraqi scene if the national forces, including the communists, had been prepared to lead and unify all the opposition forces, and to mobilize the masses."[268] It reiterated the need for the Party to "reconsider its present policy regarding the national front . . . and follow a more positive stance toward the fraternal national forces, as this [front] is the only path that will [lead] us to success in the battle of liberation from imperialism."[269]

In the meantime, the report noted, some important positive consequences did emerge from the uprising, strengthening "[the] feeling of solidarity and unity of destiny among the Iraqi people and the rest of the Arab world." In addition, the demonstrations had preoccupied the Nûrî al-Saʿîd regime for three months, thus restraining it from further aggression against other Arab countries, and had shown the world that the regime's policies had no popular support. Furthermore, the uprising had a very salutary effect in awakening public understanding of the nature of the Baghdad Pact and of the treaty's potentially calamitous impact on the "national interest and on the Arab liberation movement." The report also pointed out that "one of the most important effects of the uprising was the realization of the need to coordinate all national forces and the masses . . . and [to] prepare by being unified for the coming battle."[270] In delineating the current aims of the national movement, the report called for safeguarding the unity of the movement and for improving the movement's level of preparedness. It also asserted the need to incorporate within the movement

[266] Ibid., pp. 407–408.
[267] Ibid., pp. 408–416.
[268] Ibid., pp. 416–418.
[269] Ibid., p. 429.
[270] Ibid., pp. 438–439.

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all "Party and non-party forces" by a sustained effort to win over all the independent groups and personalities, including the masses, despite their ideological differences, and to include them in one unified front.[271] Thus, the report put the Party on the path to a national front that would mobilize all opposition forces and called on the Party to direct its energies towards that end, as well as to put into action the resolutions of the Second Party Conference, which were made imperative by the turmoil that occurred during the Suez crisis a few short weeks after the conference ended.

[271] Ibid., pp. 447–448.

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2

Ascent of the ICP in Iraqi Politics

The Tripartite aggression of 20 October 1956 against Egypt polarized politics in the entire Middle East region, including Iraq, with national fervor turning into popular political opposition to the West and its Arab allies. Public outrage in Iraq and the demonstrations that followed brought the major opposition parties closer together, and a committee representing the Baʿth, *Istiqlâl*, NDP, and ICP, and including some independent democratic personalities, was created to coordinate their activities. They formed a special Field Committee to direct the daily demonstrations that were taking place. However, the members of this committee were almost immediately arrested, forcing the Party representatives to take over the tasks themselves. In addition to forming the sub-committee, they established the Supreme Student Committee to direct and mobilize students, who in fact formed the backbone of the protests and who represented the parties. A representative of the KDP was added to this student committee, although the KDP was not officially part of the initial sub-committee.[1]

In response to these developments, Nûrî al-Saʿîd's defiance of the opposition intensified and his oppression increased, particularly of the communists and their sympathizers. This spurred closer cooperation among many of the opposition groupings, and by early 1957 the opposition's solidarity had become a pre-condition for their survival. With some effort, an alliance structure began to take shape, and in February 1957 an umbrella organization, the United National Front, was born. Recalling these events three years later, Kâmil al-Châdirchî, the leader of the NDP, explained the creation of the Front as resulting from

> the struggle between the national movement on one side, and on the other imperialism and its ruling allies . . . the idea of forming a national united front materialized to unify the efforts and coordinate actions in order to achieve the national aspirations directed

[1] ʿAzîz al-Shaikh, *Jabhat al-Ittiḥâd al-Waṭanî wa al-Mahâm al-Târîkhiyyah al-Mulqât ʿAlâ ʿÂtiqihâ fî al-Ẓarf al-Râhin* (Baghdad: al-Nûr Bookshop, 1959), p. 12; and Hânî al-Fakaikî, *Awkâr al-Hazîmah: Tajrubatî fî Ḥizb al-Baʿth al-ʿIrâqî* (London: Riad el-Rayyes Book Limited, 1993), p. 75.

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at combating imperialism and its aggressive designs, such as the Baghdad Pact and foreign military bases . . . [The United National Front] called for the unification of all anti-imperialist forces who rejected the Baghdad Pact, supported the policy of non-alignment, and adhered to a progressive Arab policy.[2]

Ibrâhîm Kubbah, an independent Marxist and University of Baghdad professor of economics, who later oversaw the Economics and Agrarian Reform portfolios in the early period of the Qâsim regime following the 1958 coup, drafted the first formal declaration of the Front. The Front leadership approved Kubbah's draft with no changes.[3] Printed on a press provided by the Communist Party,[4] and highlighting the priorities of the nationalist movement, the declaration to the Iraqi people focused on Arab and international issues in the preface and then moved on to pressing Iraqi problems:

The international situation is characterized by an intensification of the conflict between the imperial states on one side and the forces of national struggle on the other. As a result, the national struggle took new forms after the balance of power within the imperial camp shifted [in favour of the nationalist forces] after the failure of the treacherous and insane aggression against sister Egypt, [resulting] in the cracking of the imperialist edifice, the exposure of the reality of imperialist pacts and alliances, and the ignominious role played by the members of the Baghdad Pact, (especially Turkey and Iraq) in that imperialist aggression. It was inevitable that imperialists would attempt to see the growth of Arab nationalism, the emergence of the liberated Arab bloc, and the crystallization of national consciousness among the Arab people as the greatest threat[s] to their interests.[5]

The Front identified its most urgent internal short-range goals to be (1) the dissolution of Nûrî al-Saʿîd's government and its parliament as a first step towards the inauguration of an independent nationalist policy; (2) Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact and the integration of Iraq's policies with those of the liberated Arab states; (3) rejection of imperialist interference in Iraqi affairs and the adoption of an independent Arab policy based on positive neutralism; (4) the granting of democratic and constitutional freedoms; and (5) the abolition of martial law, the freeing of all political prisoners, and the reinstatement of students, workers, and government employees expelled for engaging in political activities.[6]

The Front became increasingly defiant after its initial declaration, and intensified its challenge to the Nûrî al-Saʿîd government by issuing public pronouncements elaborating on the basic principles of the draft declaration, and addressing Iraqi and Arab issues as they arose. "A Declaration on the Anniversary of the Aggression against Egypt," issued on 29 October 1957, vehemently attacked France, Britain, Israel, and the United States, and their allies in the Arab world,

[2] Al-Châdirchî, *Mudhakkarât Kâmil al-Châdirchî wa Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanî al-Dîmuqrâṭî* (Beirut: Dâr al-Ṭalîʿah, 1970), p. 676.
[3] Ibrâhîm Kubbah, *Hadha Huwa Ṭarîq 14 Tammûz* (Beirut: Dâr al-Ṭalîʿah, 1969), p. 13.
[4] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (Baghdad, 17 July 1960).
[5] Kubbah, *Hadha Huwa Ṭarîq 14 Tammûz*, pp. 229–230.
[6] Ibid., pp. 231–237.

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and saluted the Egyptian people and Nasser's leadership. On 14 November 1957 the Front issued another bold declaration, "Arab Unity: The Greatest Hope of the Arabs," in which it hailed the creation of the United Arab Republic and announced that "the United National Front expresses, in the name of the Iraqi people, its great pleasure in the union between Egypt and Syria as a nucleus of Arab unity. The Front affirms its strong determination to liberate Iraq and join the march of Arabism and liberation."

To increase its grassroots support outside the capital while affirming its presence throughout the country – as it had been unable to do in the past – the Front created a more formal structure, the Supreme National Committee, located in Baghdad. This committee became the political leadership of the Front, with representatives from all member parties, including the ICP. So that they could be binding on all member political parties, it was agreed that the committee's decisions had to be unanimous. The basic task of the Supreme National Committee, which met weekly and also on an ad hoc basis when the need arose, was to plan, coordinate, and act on behalf of all opposition groups. In addition, a Supreme Executive Committee, in which all political parties and independents were represented, was established to take charge of administrative matters and to implement decisions taken by the Supreme National Committee;[7] committee branches were soon established in the major cities of Iraq.

The ICP mobilized all its organizations in support of the Front, especially the communist-sponsored General Union of Students, Union of Democratic Youth, and League for the Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights. The Party newspaper, *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* considered

> the creation and proliferation of national committees [of the National Front] to all parts of the country to be the main goal that we should focus our efforts on at this particular juncture, for without this, the unity of the national forces would remain [only] in the Supreme Executive Committee, and [the Front] would move only in a limited circle in terms of its activities and impact on current political events.[8]

The paper encouraged Party members to propagate the message of the Front and generate public support. A few weeks later, on 8 August 1957, an internal Party circular advised the cadre that the new government of ʿAlî Jawdat al-Aiyyûbî, which had replaced Nûrî al-Saʿîd's government in June, was merely continuing the policies of the previous government. The circular called upon them to mobilize the masses to challenge the government to "retreat," and so to achieve the "demands" of the people. The circular also emphasized that the Baghdad Pact should be rejected, as well as the Eisenhower doctrine, which provided for economic and military aid, or even direct U.S. intervention, to protect any Middle Eastern nation willing to acknowledge the threat posed

[7] Al-Shaikh, *Jabhat al-Ittiḥâd al-Waṭanî wa al-Mahâm al-Târîkhiyyah al-Mulqât ʿAlâ ʿÂtiqihâ fî al-Ẓarf al-Râhin*, pp. 25–27; see also Fâḍil Ḥusain, *Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanî al-Dîmuqrâṭî, 1946–1958* (Baghdad: al-Shaʿb Press, 1963), pp. 391–392.

[8] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (beginning of June 1957).

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by international communism. The doctrine was also intended to contain Arab nationalism.

About a year later, the worsening state of the conditions of the peasants in the south of the country became a central issue in galvanizing their opposition to the government and moved the clandestine Peasants' Association of the Party to action. In late June 1957, the association led an armed uprising of the peasantry in the Diwaniyah district. They hoped that the uprising would spread to the rest of the Middle Euphrates region and that it would be the catalyst for an urban revolt that would bring the army into the popular movement and would ultimately lead to a mass revolution. The Party informed the Supreme Executive Committee of its intentions and solicited its support, which was given.[9] By the end of June, the Diwaniyah uprising had become a serious issue for the government. The need for military forces in Diwaniyah prevented the army's First Division (which was based in Diwaniyah) from giving aid to the Royal government in Baghdad when it was needed on the first day of the Qâsim coup two weeks later.

Politicization of the Army and the Qâsim Coup

Like other parts of the society, the Iraqi army was affected by events in Iraq, and as early as 19 September 1952, less than two months after the Egyptian army's coup, a small number of Iraqi officer cliques began to form in different army branches; these groups were structured on the "Free Officer" model, but had no communication with one another. With both the turmoil in Iraqi politics and the increase of Nûrî al-Saʿîd's oppression, however, these cliques became more politicized and their numbers grew. Gradually, the army groups and the opposition political parties began to communicate with each other, and with the Tripartite aggression of 29 October 1956 against Egypt, the military cells began to consolidate their structures. At the end of 1956 they formed the Supreme Officers' Committee, unifying the leadership of all these cells into a well-integrated and structured organization under Brigadier-General ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim. The ICP instructed its military organizations to unite with the Qâsim group in early 1958.[10]

Both historians and participants in the army officers' movement attribute the unification of the leadership of the cliques to the earlier formation of the United National Front.[11] Parallel organizational structures came to exist, one clandestinely in the army and the other in the civilian sphere, which, though not legal, operated openly. Because of their mutual fear of government oppression, the two groups moved cautiously in opening communications. Theoretically,

[9] Ibid. (end of June 1958). See also ICP circulars dated 6 June 1958 and 3 July 1958.

[10] Thamînah Nâjî Yûsuf and Nazâr Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil: Sîrat Munâḍil*, 2 vols. (Cyprus: al-Mada Publishing Company, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 220–221.

[11] For an excellent history and structure of the army officers' group, see Laith ʿAbd-ul-Ḥasan al-Zubaidî, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ʿIrâq*, pp. 115–158; and item, *Al-Dhâkirah al-Târîkhiyyah liThawrat 14 Tammûz, 1958* (Baghdad: Âfâq ʿArabiyyah, 1987).

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all communications of the United National Front had to go through the Secretariat of the Supreme Officers' Committee; however, communications between individual members of the officers' committee and opposition political parties continued. Through a childhood friend, Rashîd Muṭlaq, ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim maintained minimal contact with both the NDP and the ICP. The ICP, in turn, communicated informally with the USSR, while other nationalist members of the Supreme Officers' Committee kept in touch with *al-Istiqlâl* and, through it, with the Egyptian Free Officers and Nasser.[12]

According to ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah, then a member of the Central Committee, Qâsim's contact Rashîd Muṭlaq, who was also ᶜAbd-ul-lah's friend, confided to him in the summer of 1956 that Qâsim was planning a coup, and wanted "the Communist Party's cooperation only in 'public mobilization and consultation.'" The secretary-general, Salâm ᶜÂdil, gave his approval, and on 10 September 1956, immediately after the conclusion of the Second Conference, the Central Committee was for the first time informed of the Party's involvement with the impending military coup. Qâsim's main fear was focused on the possibility of outside interference. Because Iraq was a member of the Baghdad Pact, Qâsim expected that the United States, Britain, and Turkey would become involved, and therefore he wanted the Soviet Union to pledge its support for the impending coup.[13] In the meantime, *Ittiḥâd al-Shaᶜb* assessed America's future policy in the region, which would be based on the pretence of combating communism and implementing the Eisenhower doctrine but was in essence no different from the goals of the Baghdad Pact.[14]

Thus, ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah became the link between the Party and the conspirators, and as a result, he was sent by the Party's secretary-general as an envoy to the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party (which had been acting as the ICP's mentor and guardian, and was the only regional party to have close contact with the ICP). In early 1957, ᶜAbd-ul-lah met Syrian party boss Khâlid Bakdâsh, who at that time was the most trusted and senior communist leader in the region. It was hoped that Bakdâsh's close ties to the CPSU could be utilized to secure Moscow's blessing for and help with Qâsim's impending coup.[15] In an interview with the author in Damascus on 10 October 1974, Bakdâsh recalled his first impressions of ᶜAbd-ul-lah: "He was smooth, very pleasant, careful, handsomely dressed, chose his words to please his audience, showed a very sophisticated understanding of Marxism, and had read most of my writings. I have not known too many Iraqis [who were] as committed and articulate communist leaders as he was." Soon after they met, Bakdâsh invited ᶜAbd-ul-lah to attend a Peace Partisans meeting in Colombo, Ceylon. There ᶜAbd-ul-lah met Zhou Enlai, the Chinese premier, who expressed no interest in becoming

[12] al-Zubaidî, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ᶜIrâq*, pp. 69–146; see also Zakî Khairî and Suᶜâd Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûᶜî al-ᶜIrâqî*, vol. 1 (n.p., 1984), p. 262.

[13] Interview by author with ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah, London (18 January 1998).

[14] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaᶜb* (February 1957).

[15] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ᶜÂdil*, vol. 1, p. 210.

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involved in the impending coup, explaining, "China is a far off country and cannot do anything for you."[16] With that, the first humble contact between the Iraqi Communist Party and the international communist movement was initiated, with ʿAbd-ul-lah as the link. This gave him the chance to become the ICP spokesperson, and to liaise with the CPSU leadership, espouse the impending coup, and convince the Soviets that Qâsim was a serious leader whose base in the Iraqi armed forces was not negligible. In October 1956, ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah was invited to Moscow to attend the First Conference of International Communist Parties, where he was introduced by Bakdâsh to Farajallah al-Ḥilw, the charismatic leader of the Lebanese Communist Party; Fûʾâd Naṣṣar, the leader of the Jordanian Communist Party; and ʿAbd-ul-Khâliq Maḥjûb, the popular leader of the Sudanese Communist Party, thereby cementing his relationships on the regional level.[17]

ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah was unable to obtain any commitment from the Soviets, or from any other communist country, for help with the coup. ʿÂdil, however, was able to take advantage of his role as chairperson of the ICP's delegation to the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in November 1957 (on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Russian revolution) and secure support from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Travelling on to Beijing, he won the blessing of the Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung; he then went to East Germany (DDR), where he was given a warm reception. The DDR Communist Party, in a symbolic gesture of its support, presented him with the printing press it had used during its underground resistance to the Hitler regime, since the ICP's own press had just been confiscated by the Iraqi police. Stopping in Syria on his way home, ʿÂdil had hoped for a meeting with Nasser but instead received moral support for the impending coup from Nasser's deputy, Kamâl Rifʿat. ʿÂdil returned to Baghdad in May 1958 and directed ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah to continue his efforts in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.[18] In June 1958, seventeen communist parties established the *World Marxist Review* in Prague as the theoretical and intellectual voice of the international communist movement; as a result of his widespread international contacts, ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah was chosen to represent the Iraqi Communist Party.

Events moved rapidly in the Middle East, widening the gulf between the Iraqi government and the opposition forces, and exacerbating the tense situation between them. When the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) was formalized on 4 February 1958, the union was seen by the West as a threat to regional stability since it divided the region into two opposing camps, one an anti-Western nationalist bloc led by Egypt's Nasser, and the other, a pro-Western bloc led by Baghdad Pact members, with Iraq being the principal Arab link. Ten days later, in response to the formation of the UAR, Iraq and Jordan formed the Hashemite Union. With the blessing of Britain, an attempt was initiated to

[16] Interview with ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, *Abwah*, no. 2 (London, Autumn 1994), p. 82.
[17] Ibid., pp. 182–186.
[18] Ibid., pp. 210–216.

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include Kuwait in this nascent conservative union, to cement the polarization of the Arab world.

Five months later, in July 1958, the Hashemite Arab Union sent Iraqi troops to nearby Jordan in response to a nationalist uprising in Lebanon and in support of Camille Chamoun's pro-Western government. Nominally, they were positioned there to help quell the uprising if their assistance was formally requested by the Lebanese government, but this manoeuvre was also intended to deter the agitation of Arab nationalists in Lebanon who were seeking a union with Syria in the UAR. The Iraqi army was mobilized, and Qâsim and other "free officers" were put in charge of the mission, which unintentionally provided them with the cover to execute their planned coup. Qâsim informed the United National Front, on 10 July 1958, of his group's imminent action. He also informed the ICP and the NDP – who backed the action despite Châdirchî's reservations – while ᶜÂrif conveyed the information to the Baᶜth Party.[19]

Because of its contact with Qâsim on 12 July 1958, the ICP was able to issue a directive to all Party organizations hinting at an the impending coup, because of "critical political Arab and internal conditions and the possibility of the development of those conditions." It urged members to emphasize the slogans of the United National Front and stressed "the avoidance of extreme slogans that would glorify one leader or one political group, and an adherence to the basic principles of the United National Front."[20]

The exact time of the impending coup was known only to Qâsim and about a dozen other army officers, although the 250 Iraqi "free officers" were under orders from the Supreme Officers' Committee to be ready to act on short notice. Two infantry brigades, the Nineteenth and the Twentieth, moved through Baghdad on their way to Jordan in the early morning of 14 July 1958. Qâsim commanded the Nineteenth Brigade while two of the three regimental commanders, Colonels ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm ᶜÂrif and ᶜAbd-ul-laṭîf al-Darrâjî, who were Qâsim's most trusted co-conspirators, took command of the Twentieth Brigade. This was the advance unit of the troops to be sent to Jordan, while Qâsim's Nineteenth Brigade was to be the supporting unit. ᶜÂrif and Darrâjî, in command of the Twentieth Brigade, invited all those who did not already belong to the Free Officers' Movement to join them. They then moved to occupy all the most important government buildings in the capital, including the Central Military Headquarters, as well as radio and television stations throughout Baghdad. With this accomplished, they surrounded the palace and hunted for Nûrî al-Saᶜîd. At 6:30 AM the coup leaders issued their first Proclamation. Signed by Qâsim – who had taken the title commander-in-chief of the national armed forces – it declared Iraq to be a republic. In fewer than three hours, the army had the country under its control, and many in the royal family had been assassinated. A day later, Nûrî al-Saᶜîd was captured and killed.

[19] Al-Zubaidî, *al-Dhâkirah al-Târîkhiyyah li Thawrat 14 Tammûz, 1958*, pp. 82, 83.

[20] ICP pamphlet entitled *Naḥwa Ṣiyânat Muktasabât Thawratunâ wa Musânadat Jumhûriyyatunâ al-ᶜIrâqiyyah* [Toward Protecting Gains of Our Revolution and the Support of Our Iraqi Republic] Baghdad (April 1959), p. 4.

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Besides serving as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Qâsim headed a new cabinet as prime minister and also took the portfolio of minister of defence ᶜÂrif became deputy prime minister and minister of the interior. These two officers now held the most powerful positions in the Iraqi government. They then chose the other cabinet personnel. Colonel al-Darrâjî refused to accept any cabinet position but did play a role in the cabinet selection. The United National Front was assigned minor and technical cabinet positions; the NDP held two portfolios, Agriculture and Finance, assigned to Muḥammad Ḥadîd; the *Istiqlâl* held the portfolio of National Guidance; and the Baᶜth was assigned the Ministry of Development; the rest of the portfolios were distributed mainly through personal friendships and political connections.

Despite its central role in building the National Front – and its ability to secure recognition and support from the states of the international communist movement – the ICP was completely excluded from the Qâsim cabinet. Although Ibrâhîm Kubbah was assigned the portfolio of Economics before shifting to that of Agrarian Reform, no ICP members were invited. Indeed, many of their former Front colleagues quickly abandoned them.

A rubber stamp Sovereignty Council, made up of two retired senior army officers, one of whom was a Kurd and the other a Shiᶜite who headed the *Istiqlâl*, was created to approve cabinet decisions. For all practical purposes, the United National Front had come to an end, and the cabinet's only function was to provide advice to the new government. Ministers who were members of political parties were chosen on the basis of their personal capacities and not as party representatives. The fact that the Communist Party was not represented in the cabinet, and that the other members of the Front lodged no protest on the Party's behalf, signalled the ICP's complete ineffectiveness, if not its demise as a political force. According to Hesqal Kojaman:

> The announcement of the formation of the revolutionary government was, in fact, a proclamation of a bourgeois government terminating the role of the Front, and ending the [Front's] alliance with the ICP. . . . And since the ICP had already forfeited the right to participate openly in the revolutionary government, we cannot then blame the bourgeoisie for what it did. On 14 July 1958, the day of the revolution, Muḥammad Ḥadîd [Qâsim's minister of finance, then a member of the NDP], announced to the ICP member of the Front that the Front had already achieved its aims. A few days later, the Baᶜth, in its own way, announced the end of the Front and identified the ICP as the principal enemy of the revolution over and above imperialism, and threatened to "cut[off] any hand" that was extended to the ICP. Shortly after the revolution, other nationalist forces worked to form the League for the Defence of the Unity of the National Forces from the same elements of the United National Front, excluding the communists. . . . All these actions led to the conclusion that, to the bourgeoisie the Front . . . was not any longer a necessity . . . as the main aim of the bourgeoisie in collaboration with the communists was to take over the powers of the state.[21]

[21] Hesqal Kojaman, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ᶜIrâq wa Siyâsat al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûᶜî* (London: n.p., 1985), p. 134.

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When the Qâsim coup took place on the morning of 14 July 1958, ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah was in Damascus, acting as the spokesperson for the revolutionary government and contacting the Soviet ambassador and representatives of other socialist countries. Returning a few days later to Baghdad after the successful coup, he renewed his contact with his old friend and emerged as liaison between the ICP and Qâsim. By the time the rest of the Central Committee members were freed from prison, or had returned from exile, ᶜAbd-ul-lah had achieved a special position, both within the Party and in relation to the new government, from which he was able to gain access to Qâsim at any time.[22] He also built a good relationship with Qâsim's chief bodyguard and confidant, Colonel Waṣfî Ṭâhir, whose cousin, Zakî Khairî, now freed from prison, was a member of the Central Committee and was working closely with ᶜAbd-ul-lah. Thus, ᶜAbd-ul-lah put himself in the spotlight. On the Party level, after years of oppression, Kojaman relates:

> I know for a fact that the Central Committee, in August 1958, received a detailed report [recommending] that the Party take advantage of the transformation which had taken place after the revolution and the release of [Party] political prisoners, and the return of communist cadres in exile, by holding a Second Party Congress which was to have two main goals. First, to study the mistakes that the Party had committed during the period that followed the execution of the three comrades [in 1949] in which the Party was directed by a succession of enthusiastic leaders who, under the circumstances, worked very hard to regroup the Party and raise its standards. However, by necessity this leadership was unfortunately limited in its intellectual capacity and in its practical experience. Second, to study the [nature] of the class alignment that emerged after the revolution and delineate the strategy for the new stage deriving from that.[23]

The Communists After the 14 July 1958 Revolution

Although aware of the impending coup attempt by the Free Officers, the ICP leadership was slow to react when it proved a success. They did not have any clear strategy for dealing with the new political conditions that emerged, and the leadership found itself responding to events as they arose rather than directing them. Their immediate aim came to be the "defence of the Republic," which translated into the defence of the military regime and its bourgeois leadership. Both the Popular Committees for the Defence of the Republic and a Popular Resistance Militia, supported by the ICP, were formed, and the clandestine Iraqi Union of Democratic Youth and League of Iraqi Women (until 7 March 1960 known as the League for the Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights) become openly active, propagating the revolution and devoting their energies to the media and to mobilizing the masses in support of the revolution. Moreover, soon after the coup, a conflict arose between Qâsim and his second-in-command,

[22] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 719.

[23] Ibid.; see also Kojaman, *Thawrat 14 Tammûz 1958 fî al-ᶜIrâq wa Siyâsat al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûᶜî*, p. 94.

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ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm ᶜÂrif, on the issue of Arab unity, that is, over possible unification with the UAR. The United National Front groupings, having already lost cohesion, split between the Arab nationalists supporting ᶜÂrif (who espoused immediate and unconditional unity with the UAR), and the left of the NDP and the communists supporting Qâsim (who favoured a looser unity in the form of a federal connection). The ICP publicly proclaimed its position, declaring on the day of the revolution that

> we, the communists who have the privilege to advocate the [creation] of the republic and had the honour of persevering with the rest of the nationalist forces . . . towards its achievements, promise the people . . . that we shall continue to struggle to preserve our Iraqi Republic . . . for the sake of an honourable, free, democratic life for the Iraqi people and for the sake of Arab unity, peace, and progress.[24]

A memorandum written on behalf of the Politburo by ᶜÂdil on the second day of the revolution offered the following recommendations to Qâsim and the leadership of the new republic in order to safeguard the revolution:

> First, there should be a clear and firm national policy, and this requires that Iraq immediately withdraw from the Baghdad Pact, the abandonment of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty [of 1930], a declaration of federal unity with the UAR, a re-examination of Iraq's foreign relations on an independent basis, and an establishing of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. . . . secondly, the release of all political prisoners, the espousal of popular committees for the defence of the republic, and the immediate creation of an armed popular militia. . . . Thirdly, the imposition of firm and immediate control of [the foreign] companies, banks, ports, storage [facilities,] and major economic establishments for the purpose of protecting our revolution and our national economy. . . . Fourthly, the experience of the first day of the revolution showed the need to take rapid steps toward public guidance, especially by the radio stations, so as to guarantee [the republic's] true expression on the aims of the [revolutionary] movement and its national democratic content, and in order to avoid the creation of division within the ranks of the people.[25]

On 15 July, Iraq withdrew from the Hashemite Union and abrogated any obligations associated with it. On 16 July, the USSR recognized the new Iraqi Republic, and on 17 July, Iraq re-established formal relations with the Soviet Union. On 18 July, an Iraqi delegation headed by ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm ᶜÂrif, along with the ministers of finance, foreign affairs, and national guidance, flew to Damascus, where they met Egyptian President Nasser. An agreement of cooperation between the UAR and the new Iraqi Republic was signed, in which the UAR promised military support to Iraq in the event of any foreign aggression against the Republic, as well as economic and cultural assistance. The new government freed all political prisoners, voided the oppressive decrees of Nûrî al-Saᶜîd, declared its intention to withdraw from the Baghdad

[24] ICP pamphlet entitled *Fî Sabîl Ṣiyânat wa al-Ḥifâẓ ᶜAlâ Muktasabât al-Thawrah wa al-Ḥifâẓ ᶜAlâ Muktasabât al-Jumhûriyyah* [For the Sake of Protecting the Gains of the Revolution and Strengthening the Gains of the Republic] (September 1958).

[25] Ibid., See also Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ᶜÂdil*, vol. 1, pp. 230–233.

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Pact – which it did a year later – and disassociated itself from other aspects of the monarchy's foreign policy. On 27 July, a provisional constitution was adopted in which the republican regime was legally constituted. Executive and legislative power rested in the Council of Ministers, though the relationship between the prime minister and his council was left vague. Since the prime minister appointed the cabinet and controlled the army, the roles of the two government organs became even more blurred. From its first day the cabinet was completely subservient to the prime minister, thus setting the direction of the new republic. This was seen to be particularly true when the Sovereignty Council, supposedly Iraq's highest body, was given no veto powers and was confined to a ceremonial role.

ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj described the political scene after his release from prison, immediately following the revolution:

> I found Baghdad, upon my release, in the most jumbled condition. Political parties were suddenly allowed to function . . . [and] began to propagate their views [in a chaotic manner]. Each one considered itself to be the vanguard [of the national movement]. The communists with their slogan: Without Fahd there would not have been ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim . . . boasted about the amount of their suffering and torture . . . The nationalists, *Istiqlâl* and the Baᶜth parties responded by [uniting] to stop the communists.[26]

Inevitably, the two groups collided fiercely.

On the Party level, the situation was no different. Following his release from prison sometime at the end of July, Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî described the organizational disunity on his first meeting with the Politburo:

> [It was] a strange makeup for me as it was composed of Salâm ᶜÂdil, Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, and ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah, who until my arrest five years earlier was no more than a supporter of the Party who was not organized in any Party cell and knew nothing of internal Party affairs. Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî had spearheaded the splinter group, *Râyat al-Shaghîlah*, until 1956.[27]

This confusion was also reflected in the Party leadership. In these tense and unusual conditions, the secretary-general, rather than going through normal Party channels, continued to make decisions as the need arose, without consultation and in the manner he had done over the past three years when he had been rebuilding the Party during the "underground years."

ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah returned to Baghdad four days after the revolution, confident of his own importance since he had been the representative for the revolution and the Party abroad for more than a year, and had also been the Party liaison with Qâsim, the leader of the new regime. He had built close personal relationships with the regional and international communist movement, becoming virtually the only link that the Party had to the outside world, whereas

[26] ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, *Dhâkirat al-Nakhîl* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ᶜArabiyyah lil Dirâsât wa al-Nashr, 1993), p. 169.

[27] Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, *Mudhakkarât Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî* (Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan: n.p., 1992), p. 173.

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ʿÂdil had remained in official control of the Party. In effect, this created a de facto dual leadership. ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah – self-confident, sure of the secretary-general's style, and well aware of his own relationship with Qâsim and the rest of the coup leadership – resented ʿÂdil's approach and began to question it, though mildly. He began to meet with the rest of the Party leadership, communicating what he presented as the "advice" of regional communist leaders such as Khâlid Bakdâsh, the Syrian Party boss; Fûʾâd Naṣṣar, the secretary-general of the Jordanian Party; and Nicola Shâwî of the Lebanese Communist Party. This advice was to "Soft pedal your ideas, rather than confronting them, as they are military men, and we, as communists, should learn from the Egyptian experience after the 1952 Nasser coup, especially when the ICP has a sympathetic understanding with the coup leadership."[28]

Nevertheless, as early as the second day of the coup, the secretary-general was advocating that the ICP continue to pressure the regime to implement basic democratic reforms, such as freedom of assembly and organization, that ʿÂdil had advocated in his Party memorandum to Qâsim on 15 July. ʿÂdil, disappointed that the Party was the only member of the National Front not represented in the government, sought to influence the military regime through popular demands, which he termed "the tactic of pressure from below."

The discontent between the two leaders eventually surfaced when the Central Committee met on 29 July to deal with the issue of influencing the regime. The Central Committee endorsed ʿÂdil's approach, with the caveat that the grassroots cadre be instructed on the implications and importance of the Party's approach. One of the first attempts to do this was in a conference with the Baghdad section, the most important section of the ICP, in early August 1958. The secretary-general opened the Baghdad Section Conference and outlined the class nature of the regime, which he described as

> a national bourgeois, anti-imperialist regime, representing the interests of the bourgeoisie. . . . The composition of the revolutionary government does not represent all the national forces, and here lies the contradiction between the core revolutionary forces (workers, peasants, petit bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie) and groups which took over power after the revolution, representing the interests of the petit bourgeoisie and the middle class only. This is the foundation for the creation and widening of the conflicts within the national movement and its parties.

ʿÂdil also analyzed the leadership of the regime, calling Qâsim

> progressive, and leftist, and having some understanding and an elementary grasp of democracy, and who can be influenced to sharpen these tendencies. . . . As for ʿAbd-ul-Salâm ʿÂrif, he is anti-communist, has no connection with any progressive circles, and is impetuous, rash, and self-centred to an extreme degree. Our information about when he joined the Supreme Committee of the Free Officers is that he was the worst of them.[29]

[28] Interview by author with ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, London (19 January 1993).
[29] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, vol. 1, pp. 246–247.

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ᶜÂdil also explained that the government bureaucracy was anti-communist, and that the Party was not represented in the government. Consequently, in ᶜÂdil's view, the primary responsibility of the Party was to work from below by pressuring the government to introduce democratic reforms, after which the regime could be forced to allow the right of assembly and organization. In this situation, the Party could mobilize the population into further influencing the government. Thus, "the main objective of the Party's internal life is the necessity to comprehend and deepen the understanding of Party policy by the cadre and membership, who should commit themselves fully to its implementation."[30] The secretary-general seems to have regained control over the Party as a result of its adopting this policy, but the power struggle between the two men continued to fester, gradually leading to the formation of two camps within the Party leadership.

At a Party Central Committee meeting on 2 September 1958 to deal with Party policy (particularly the Party's relationship to the new regime), the Central Committee called for a plenary session, which was held four days later, on 6 September. At this meeting a new Politburo, including the secretary-general, was formally elected. This was the largest such session in the Party's history, and the first after the September 1956 plenary session that followed the Second Party Conference. The secretary-general stated:

> This plenary meeting is held in the best internal conditions experienced by our Party . . . as its organizational Party network has extended to all parts of the country, and as such, its political influence has expanded. This meeting has brought back together all of its cadre by settling its schisms, those freed from jail, along with those who have returned from exile, as a consequence of the victorious revolution and the establishment of the heroic Iraqi Republic.[31]

The secretary-general identified the goals of the Party and the national movement at this time as the defence of the Republic and "the strengthening of its democratic anti-imperialist and anti-feudal direction," along with the institution of democratic freedoms (especially "the freedoms of organization and the press,"[32] respect for Kurdish national rights, and implementation of the clauses in the constitution related to cultural and administrative control). The Party also called for protection of the national economy; land reform; a closer watch over multinational companies, including oil and banking interests; and the encouragement of domestic investment and national industries.

In foreign policy, the Party's aim was to strengthen national independence through Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact and its abrogation of the Iraqi-British agreements and of its 21 April 1954 military assistance understanding with the United States. It also called for closer cooperation with the "liberated" Arab countries, and a strengthening of the Arab League to "struggle"

[30] Ibid., p. 249.
[31] Ibid., p. 252.
[32] Ibid., p. 257.

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against imperialism and in support of Arab solidarity. It recommended that Iraq join the United Arab Republic, that there be closer cooperation with the Afro-Asian bloc, and that political, economic, and cultural relations with the Soviet Union, China, and other socialist camp countries be strengthened.[33] On the internal front, the Politburo stressed that its aim was to combat rightist deviationist views within the Party, and emphasized its impact on the Arab world:

> As the burgeoning influence of bourgeois nationalism has a "positive dimension" in the aspirations of the Arab peoples for Arab liberation from imperialism and towards "national unity" . . . it also has a "negative side" in that it spreads bourgeois thoughts and creates objective conditions conducive to the development of nationalist, rightist, deviationist thoughts that penetrate the working-class movement and will "feed" the rightist currents in that movement.[34]

The secretary-general's report explained why this phenomenon was much more acute in Iraq, as well as why it would result in a negative reaction from the Kurds who would feel threatened and excluded from the majority Arab population, thus feeding Kurdish the separatist movement. It also called for a widening of the Party's grassroots base, particularly among peasants and workers, by recruiting carefully screened, committed cadres from these groups. It reiterated the need for internal Party discipline: "[The] complete adherence to Party policies, aims and principles is the only condition that will secure success in implementing Party strategies and achiev[ing] our people's goals."[35]

The conference discussed and unanimously approved the secretary-general's report. It gave the secretary-general its unconditional support and affirmed his leadership of the Party; at the same time, it silenced the voices of dissent, at least temporarily. Limited though they were, dissident views were represented mainly by ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, who disagreed with the secretary-general on tactics and personal style, though not on Party policies. Nevertheless, the seeds of disagreement had been sown, and they would develop within a few months into a full-fledged conflict between the two men, splitting the Politburo and Central Committee in an open struggle for control of the Party.

With the public's support and sympathy, the communists began to openly organize themselves, although this activity was mixed with a certain opportunism, as people saw the new revolutionary government as leftist oriented and to some degree communist influenced. This was particularly evident since the communists were the only group to staff the recently licensed newspapers and journals, and government-run radio and television, and to propagate the new revolutionary vision.

In the meantime, labour and peasant organizations began to spring up, and although they were tolerated, they were not yet formally sanctioned. The ICP

33 Ibid., pp. 257–258.
34 Ibid., p. 260.
35 Ibid., p. 262.

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had its own already-functioning clandestine organizational structures, which now came to the surface, visibly filling the organizational vacuum. The executive committee for the workers' unions began its activities under the leadership of a well-respected communist leader, ʿAlî Shukr, and the Union of Peasant Associations also began to operate openly under the nominal leadership of a leftist NDP figurehead and petit landowner, ʿArrâk al-Zigam. The majority of the peasant union's membership had in fact been organized in the 1950s by the ICP under the auspices of the "Friends of the Peasant" associations. Meanwhile, the legal professional organizations of teachers, lawyers, journalists, doctors, and engineers were controlled by the left in general, including both the ICP and its unpredictable ally, the NDP. The General Union of Iraqi Students, the Union of Democratic Youth, and the League of Iraqi Women, all communist-front organizations, were now also formally licensed. The Partisans of Peace also functioned openly and freely under the leadership of ʿAzîz Sharîf, as did the communist-sponsored Committee for the Protection of the Revolution, which penetrated government offices.[36]

In these circumstances, and perhaps in response to the ICR's popularity, a rift opened between the members of the United National Front (particularly *al-Istiqlâl* and the Baʿth, as well as a large number of NDP members) and the communists. These groups feared the control the ICP held over the masses as a result of public misconceptions and sympathy. The communists, disappointed by the new leadership, increasingly became aware of the strength of their own popular support. In the Party's first plenary session on 6 September 1958, the members condemned exclusion of the ICP from the government as a desertion of the masses: "[Since] the government, which emerged after the revolution . . . is one of a national revolutionary bourgeoisie, but does not represent all the national forces, here lies the contradiction between the leading forces of the national movement [and the coup government]."[37] The rift between the communist movement and the other nationalist forces widened, reaching its climax over unity with the UAR. The leftists and communists insisted on a federation, with democratic processes being allowed to determine the road to unity, whereas the nationalists sought an unconditional, complete, and immediate merger. Gradually, this issue evolved into a conflict between Qâsim, who came to personify the Iraqi left, and ʿÂrif, who now represented the Pan-Arab nationalists;

> The nationalist movement was now divided into two polarized camps. ʿAbd-ul-Salâm ʿÂrif advocated the slogan of "immediate unity" with the UAR, supported by the national and populist groups, as well as some military officers. In the other camp, Qâsim was supported by the ICP, [some] of the NDP, and the Kurdish movement who were against the immediate merger and feared being further marginalized in a larger Arab Union. Qâsim's main strategy was to play the game of balancing political forces

[36] Ṣalâḥ al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq* (Beirut: Dâr al-Furât, 1993), pp. 87–88.

[37] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, pp. 270–272.

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and neutralizing each of them in order to strengthen his authority and transform the revolution into a military dictatorship with a narrow personal orientation.[38]

According to Zakî Khairî, three weeks after the revolution the ICP, in a direct challenge to ʿÂrif, threw its weight behind Qâsim and organized public demonstrations

> with the tacit backing of General Qâsim, who was in great need of public support in his opposition [to the nationalist] call for an immediate merger, which [he viewed as stripping him] of all his powers. . . . The Party prepared slogans and utilized government radio and television to call upon the people to join the demonstrations.[39]

Fearing that a split within the national movement would lead to conflict, Kâmil al-Châdirchî, the head of the NDP, flew to Cairo at the end of September 1958 and tried to convince Nasser to limit his advocacy for an immediate union with the UAR. He also called on Nasser to persuade the Iraqi nationalists and ʿÂrif to defuse the crisis between them and Qâsim, which might, if it continued, result in the demise of the concept of Iraqi unity altogether. Nasser refused to become involved in this internal issue, declaring, "Unify your country. Do not get entangled in a civil war, and I, no matter what, will not advise you to unite or confederate."[40] The crisis reached its peak when the pro-unification nationalists resigned en masse from the government on 5–6 February 1959.

The ICP had reached the height of its influence on the Qâsim government. On 25 January 1959, even while the Party was still illegal, *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* was licensed, thereby giving the ICP a public voice. In its very first editorial, the paper declared itself to be "the voice of 'the toiling masses,' and the brave vanguard of the Iraqi people." The July coup had been a deep expression of the people's wish and a logical result of the revolutionary struggle "whose fire was lit by the daring son of the people, Qâsim and his brave fellow officers." The paper described the current situation in Iraq as the "stage of revolutionary, political, and economic struggle for liberation from colonial control and feudalism."[41] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* became the most widely read Iraqi daily, with its offices becoming, in effect, the headquarters of the Party's Central Committee. Although ʿAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâʿîl al-Bustânî was the paper's official editor, ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah was its true political editor, aided by Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî and, in June, by Zakî Khairî. However, Salâm ʿÂdil remained the real power behind the newspaper, and all of its editorials, which reflected Party policy, "were either written [by him] or [had] their central ideas dictated by him."[42] Commenting on 9 February 1959 on the mass resignations by the pro-unionist government members, *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* stated:

[38] Al-Ḥâjj, *Dhâkirat al-Nakhîl*, p. 169.
[39] Zakî Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram* (Göttenberg, Sweden: Arabiska Bokstavscentre, 1996), p. 190.
[40] *Al-Ahram* (Cairo, 24 July 1959).
[41] *Ittiḥâd al- Shaʿb* [Our Arab Stage of Today] (25 January 1959), p. 2.
[42] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 215.

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As soon as the revolution took its first steps . . . the signs of regression against its march began to be evident among some of those in charge who had risen to power in the cabinet by the revolutionary [regime]. . . . [This regression] took the form of direct and indirect sympathy for an anti-republican [regime] in both foreign and domestic [spheres]. . . . In our opinion the latest cabinet shuffle is a positive action that will have great importance at this stage.

Qâsim, supported by the ICP, was suspicious of Nasser and his pan-Arab aspirations, and consequently he continued to encourage the ICP as a counterweight to the Baʿth Party, the *Istiqlâl*, and other pan-Arab and nationalist groups in the country. With such encouragement, the ICP zealously set about confronting those Arab nationalist forces throughout Iraq bent on union with the UAR. Communist front organizations (such as the mass membership "Partisans of Peace") multiplied and prospered, and many existing revolutionary organizations, notably the Popular Resistance Forces (a newly formed civilian militia) and the Committee for the Preservation of the Republic, revealed their communist inclinations. On 8 March 1959, when nationalist army officers led by Colonel ʿAbd-ul-Wahhâb al-Shawwâf rebelled against Qâsim in Mosul, the communists played a leading role in the brutal crushing of the revolt. Following their defeat of Shawwâf's forces in bitter fighting, ICP cadres and supporters, together with other anti-nationalist forces, engaged in a merciless three-day purge of the city, during which rebel sympathizers and "class enemies" were subject to summary trial and execution.[43]

The ICP emerged from the Mosul revolt flushed with success and began to press Qâsim for a greater role in the government. One of the secretary-general's first steps was to issue an open letter to Qâsim in which he complained that the Party was not formally consulted on public issues and was not even represented in the cabinet, despite its commitment to the revolution. The letter asserted that "events have confirmed the necessity and significance of greater solidarity. We say, with deep regret, that we are still victims of discrimination among the nationalist forces, and the limited opportunity open to our Party is not in conformity with the very interests of the Republic."[44] In an interview in *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* on 30 March, fewer than three weeks after the Shawwâf revolt, ʿÂdil described the rebellion as an Anglo-American plan to overthrow the republican regime by utilizing a fifth column to divide the national ranks. ʿÂdil identified the Baʿthists as the group behind the plot. They were

pushing to amalgamate Iraq with the UAR to achieve their objectives. They worked sedulously in that direction . . . and when they were not able to achieve their aims through practical [political] means . . . and unsuccessful in winning the masses to their slogans and views . . . they gradually sank to the path of conspiracy and violence to achieve these goals.

[43] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 864–889.
[44] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (31 March 1959).

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At the end of April, in a number of editorials attributed by Zakî Khairî to ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah and Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî,[45] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* daringly demanded participation in the government. On 28 April, the Central Committee again called for communist participation as a national necessity, complaining that "as early as the first day of the revolution the policy of discrimination between patriotic forces played a negative role, and our Party was excluded from the cabinet."[46] The following day another editorial reiterated that "communist participation was an important factor for securing international, Arab and popular support." On the same day, the ICP also expressed its preference for the important portfolio of Ministry of the Interior, in addition to three other cabinet posts.[47] The demands continued, and on 30 April, another editorial stated that "the sensitivity of other groups to ICP participation in the cabinet [and submission to these groups] will encourage the imperialists and their supporters to interfere in our internal affairs and challenge our national independence." The ICP's successes up to this point, their burgeoning confidence, and the tone of the editorials placed the Party on a collision course with Qâsim, who was clearly unwilling to tolerate alternate power centres within the Iraqi political arena. In a speech that he gave on the evening of 30 April 1959 at the ICP's stronghold, the Iraqi General Union of Labour, Qâsim reacted to the repeated communist demands by vehemently attacking all parties and partisanship, describing them as "ugly demon actions" and hinting that the ICP was a destructive force working against the republic.[48]

The next day, while celebrating May Day, participants in the largest public demonstration ever organized and led by the communists repeated the Party's demands for a communist presence in the cabinet. Passing Qâsim's headquarters, the demonstrators, in a show of force and public solidarity with the Party, chanted what later became their infamous slogan, which equated the leadership of Qâsim with communist participation: "Long live our hero, ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim. Communist participation is a great public demand."[49] Contrary to Qâsim's usual custom of returning their salute on such occasions, he was "decisively clear in his refusal . . . to go out and greet the demonstrators, and immediately initiated a furious campaign of speeches against the Communist Party. As Qâsim had not expected that[the] May Day celebrations would turn partisan, he had tolerated the participation of police and military academies."[50] Qâsim's furious reaction caught the Party leadership totally by surprise, since they were under the impression (from contacts via ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah and ʿAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâʿîl al-Bustânî) that Qâsim was close to the left and to the progressive national movement, including the Communist Party. As a result of the contradiction between this understanding and Qâsim's speeches, ʿÂdil, rather

[45] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 209.
[46] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (28 April, 1959).
[47] Al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târikh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 91.
[48] *Al-Thawrah* (Baghdad, 1 May 1959).
[49] The ICP leadership had long insisted that the slogan was not sanctioned by the Party, but was the result of spontaneous popular identification.
[50] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 210.

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than use a "go between, insisted on meeting Qâsim as soon as possible to discover where the Party stood.

In a meeting with Qâsim in early May, ʿÂdil tried to discuss the dangers of a rupture between the "national forces" and the regime that would weaken them both. To avoid this, he suggested the desirability of reviving the United National Front and permitting democratic freedoms. Qâsim ridiculed the idea and promptly terminated the meeting, angering and dismaying ʿÂdil, who concluded that ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah had been "dishonest" in conveying the views of each group to the other.[51] Following his meeting with Qâsim, ʿÂdil became convinced that the regime's change in attitude towards the Party and the "national democratic movement" following the May Day celebrations had been predictable outcome determined by the class nature of the regime and intended to strengthen Qâsim's dictatorial system.[52] Soon after, the Party Politburo met to discuss Qâsim's reaction to the ICP demands and the increasing tension between Qâsim and the Party. Most of the Politburo blamed Salâm ʿÂdil for the degenerating situation,[53] but the secretary-general disputed this, pointing out that "the Party paper sponsored this slogan and the demonstrators spontaneously took it up. Can the Party question the masses that respond to the call?"[54] and hinting that ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî, and Zakî Khairî were the authors of the Party articles. The Politburo initiated a programme to reduce the intensity of the campaign, praising Qâsim's leadership rather than pursuing its demands to have seats in the cabinet. In a meeting between 8 and 9 June, the Politburo attempted to mollify Qâsim's fears. As noted on the first page of the 10 July issue of *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb*:

> our Party was denied the right of representation in government . . . which had negative results. . . . and the best way to identify those who support [the republic] is through [the actions of] national parties and organizations which have [already] proved their commitment. . . . if we did ask to shoulder the responsibility of [being] in government . . . it is because of our feeling of responsibility.

On both 10 and 11 May, lengthy articles by Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî appeared on the first page of *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb*; they seemed less concerned with placating Qâsim than with attempting to explain the earlier Party demands:

> The ICP's participation in government will strengthen our national democracy. . . . The question of communist participation in government has become a mature, acceptable, and necessary proposition, more pressing then ever, as proved by the popular demonstrations of 1 May. In addition, the level of maturity achieved by our revolution today requires much more than it did in the past. The re-examination of the composition of the cabinet is essential, so as to make it an efficient tool to put into action the new programs of the revolutionary government.

[51] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, vol. 2, p. 18.
[52] Ibid., p. 12.
[53] Ibid., p. 211.
[54] Ibid.

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In the same issue, *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* apologized indirectly by suggesting that the slogan raised by the demonstrators on May Day was spontaneous:

> The masses were not used to Party activities . . . and thus it was expected that their enthusiasm would not be without error . . . and because political parties are not licensed . . . their activities will be hindered [and] their organizational abilities will be limited, and thus, they will not be able to control the masses.

According to Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî, this change in tone was imposed upon the communists by the CPSU, which viewed the slogans as leftist extremism and called for complete support for Qâsim.[55] Indeed, in a 12 May editorial along the same lines, the paper tried to soften the earlier demands:

> When our Party today calls for our participation in government, it bases this on the premise of a coalition government that should include representatives of all national forces. The Party rests its position – not on the basis of monopolizing [power] – but rather on the foundation of brotherly sharing and cooperation in the republic's interest, and the welfare of its people. . . . this is the Party's official policy when it contemplates participation in the responsibility of power in the cabinet.

In its 10 May editorial *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* had declared that "the communists are the solid buttress for the democratic republic and the leadership of the genuine son of the people, ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim, [is] to the detriment of the imperialists, the avaricious, their lackeys, and the divisive." Fearing Qâsim's indignation, the Politburo instructed the membership on 23 May to abandon the demand for communist participation in the government.[56] Nevertheless, alarmed at the increased popularity of the ICP, Qâsim took steps to remove communist influence from the army.[57]

Political tensions now spilled over to the ranks of progressive forces, and between February and March the members of the national democratic left, including the NDP and the communists, clashed sporadically. As late as 8 May the NDP arm *Al-Ahâlî* did not appear to pay much attention to this development. Surprisingly, however, when the NDP held its consultative meetings between 11 and 13 May 1959, its leadership, with Qâsim's encouragement, proposed a "freezing" of NDP activities until the transition to democracy was concluded and political parties were allowed to function. Consequently, on 20 May, the NDP announced that it was ceasing its activities. Two days later, a group of NDP leftists who considered this decision to be premature protested that the declaration had been promulgated by the leadership rather than debated by the Party.[58] The next day, the ICP issued a statement declaring that "the activities of the NDP in Iraqi political life are a historical necessity. The NDP should continue to struggle to strengthen the revolution and its gains, and all parties must revitalize their activities."[59]

[55] Nûrî, *Mudhakkarât Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî*, p. 194.
[56] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (23 May 1959).
[57] Al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 91.
[58] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (22 May 1959).
[59] Ibid. (23 May 1959).

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To recoup its credibility among nationalists, the ICP now busied itself in attempting to reassemble the facade of the United National Front, to be composed of its sympathizers in the Kurdish Democratic Party and the leftist elements of the NDP. Aware of the communists' tactical manoeuvres to tone down their demands by casting them in terms of a renewed national front, Qâsim at a meeting with the secretary-general of the Party in early May, asked sarcastically, "What does the ICP need a Front for, if it has the support of 70 percent of the population?"[60] On 30 June this new Front was declared by the ICP to be "the expression of the people's struggle . . . [in] its readiness to organize in order to spoil the conspiracies of the enemies of the Republic."[61] The new Front was described as "a decisive blow to the imperialists and their agents." Membership in the Front was open to all other forces,[62] and it was "hailed as being the only means to mobilize the people and unify their ranks."[63]

Communist-run committees were formed in military units and government offices, and among workers and peasants, to guard against the "enemies of the people," and to extend communist influence in those sectors. The *Istiqlâl* Party and the Baʿthists had already been driven underground. However, the influence and popularity of the Communist Party in the middle of 1959 could be seen in the wide circulation of the Party's paper, which reached around 23,000 readers. All other papers had circulations of only about 10 per cent of this number. Furthermore, the number of Party members and candidates waiting to join the Party exceeded 20,000; Party front organizations such as the League for the Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights reached 40,000 members; the Iraqi Union of Democratic Youth had 84,000 members; the National Congress of Peasant Societies claimed to have 2,000 societies under its umbrella, totalling some 250,000 members; and the General Union of Labour reckoned that it represented fifty-one labour unions with a membership of 275,000.[64] To balance this perceived communist domination, Qâsim released some Arab nationalist detainees in June and July and placed curbs on the operation of pro-Communist popular resistance forces.

From 14 to 16 July 1959, the Mosul purges were replayed, as pro-communist Kurds fought anti-communist Turkomens in the city of Kirkuk. The communists and the Bârzânî Kurdish groups

> initiated a slaughter, and vicious violations [of human rights] were committed as dozens of innocent Turkomens were arrested, killed . . . and some even buried alive. This bloody wave was a spontaneous expression of Kurdish chauvinism against [Turkomens], and what exacerbated the matter were the misguided actions of the Iraqi Communist Party.[65]

[60] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 209.
[61] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (30 June 1959).
[62] Ibid. (1 July 1959).
[63] Ibid. (2 July 1959).
[64] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, vol. 2, pp. 45, 46; and Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 896–897.
[65] ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj, *Maʿa al-Aʿwâm: Ṣafahât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq Baina 1958–69* (Beirut: al-Mûʿassasah al-ʿArabiyyah lil Dirâsât wa al-Nashr, 1981), p. 62.

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Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb mistakenly hailed the Kurdish action as supporting the revolution, though a decade later ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj revealed that the ICP official in charge of Kirkuk at that time had admitted that the clash was essentially a racist provocation against the Turkomens.[66] In a speech on 19 July following the Kirkuk massacre, Qâsim denounced the incident as being motivated by "cruelty and blind fanaticism."[67] At a news conference ten days later, he repeated his attack on those he identified as responsible, and although he did not mention the communists by name, he signalled a campaign against them.[68]

In response to this further deterioration in the political climate, attempts were made to allocate blame, and recriminations began to fly among members of the Politburo; this resulted in the resurfacing of two factions, one consisting of Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, and ʿÂdil, and the other of the remainder of the Politburo. This majority group, led by Qâsim supporters, included the ambitious ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah and the unhappy Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî, and was supported by Zakî Khairî and Muḥammad Ḥusain Abû-l-ʿÎss. It later became known as the "Clique of Four." Zakî Khairî and Muḥammad Ḥusain Abû-l-ʿÎss, while not official members of the Central Committee (having been co-opted by the secretary-general into the Politburo in a consultative capacity), now acted as if they were full members of the Politburo. These aspirants to Party leadership believed themselves more qualified than ʿÂdil because of seniority and intellectual ability, and they saw this moment as their chance to play a more decisive role in Iraqi politics. They portrayed Qâsim as a genuine national democrat who had some leftist leanings and could be won over by appropriate Party actions, just as Fidel Castro had been won over by the communists in Cuba. The secretary-general, they claimed, had somehow created a dangerous level of animosity with Qâsim, and thus blame for this crisis must rest on him and on his chief assistant, Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî. They based their argument on the fact that between September 1958 and July 1959, the secretary-general, along with a very limited number of his supporters, had run Party affairs with no formal meetings, discussions, or input from either the Politburo or the Central Committee.[69]

For this reason, the Clique of Four called for formal and more regular Central Committee plenary session meetings. In preparation for these full meetings, the Politburo held its own formal meetings in mid-July to evaluate the events to be discussed at the scheduled Central Committee plenary session. The Clique of Four now prepared to carry their fight further and to disseminate a very clear position to the Central Committee and, eventually, to the general cadre, concerning the secretary-general's approach towards overall Party policies. Adding insult to injury, the clique initiated its attack on ʿÂdil by rejecting his report, which would customarily have been submitted as the Politburo report at the

[66] Ibid., p. 62.
[67] *Iraqi Times* (20 July 1959).
[68] *Al-Zamân* (Baghdad, 30 July 1959).
[69] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 210, 211; al-Ḥâjj, *Maʿa al-Aʿwâm*, p. 63; and Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, vol. 2, pp. 49–65.

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Central Committee meeting. Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî became the most vehement propounder of the clique's views, his sole aim being to unseat the secretary-general. ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah and the rest of the clique stayed in the background and confined themselves to formulating policies and ideological positions that indirectly supported and strengthened Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî's position, approach, which was evolving into a personal vendetta against ʿÂdil. The tension at the Politburo meeting, which lasted all night, reached such a level that the meeting was adjourned by ʿÂdil and al-Ḥaidarî, although the rest of the participants surreptitiously continued to prepare their strategy for the next day's session.

The plenary meeting on the following day was one of the largest in the history of the Party, with thirty-three Central Committee members in attendance. With regard to the tension between Qâsim and the ICP, the clique presented its position as being the result of the secretary-general's intransigence. They pointed in particular to ʿÂdil's drive to secure Party participation in the cabinet, which was to their minds was the main reason for Qâsim's animosity towards the Party. According to the clique's members, ʿÂdil's focus on the cabinet resulted from his "leftist deviationist" failure to follow the principle of collective leadership. Consequently, they maintained, ʿÂdil must bear the complete responsibility for the debacle. Furthermore, he should be removed from office, and a new Central Committee and Politburo elected at a future Party congress. The summary report of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee, hurriedly cobbled together and modified by ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah to appease Qâsim,[70] explained that

> an attempt was made by the [imperialists] . . . and their supporters to disseminate rumours and fabrications in order to sow the seeds of division between the national forces, and turn the members against each other, thus creating mistrust and spreading doubts between the government and its people. . . . Our Party would like to emphasize – in the name of the masses – its clear policy of supporting the revolution and the leader of the republic, ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim. . . . The support of our Party for the national government is based on our logical analysis of the necessity and importance of unifying the ranks in order to safeguard and achieve the common great aims of the people. We support and appreciate the leader, ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim, as the leader of the great liberating revolution . . . which destroyed the system of imperialism and the old enslaving regime. [He] restored to the people their freedom, rights and dignity, and because he is committed to an anti-imperialist policy to complete the country's independence and secure the people's freedoms and democratic rights . . . the ICP declares again that it will stand strongly and firmly against all attempts to undermine the security of the republic and threaten the people's gains. It also emphasizes its firm belief that the solidarity of the people and its national forces, with their national government and brave army under the leadership of ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim, is a strong and assured guarantee to spoil all treacherous attempts of the imperialists and their reactionary supporters, and the enemies of the revolution.[71]

[70] For ʿÂdil's perspective, see Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ʿÂdil*, vol. 2, pp. 74–97.
[71] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (3 August 1959).

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The plenary session was tense and mobilized against ᶜÂdil. Nevertheless, he was allowed to give the report earlier rejected by the Politburo, which was now presented as a personal report to the Central Committee. ᶜÂdil's report analyzed the political situation from a classical communist class perspective, asserting that because of its bourgeois class nature the Qâsim regime had, after attaining power, turned its back on its previous allies in the working class. Despite the clique's opposition, ᶜÂdil was re-elected, although the bulk of the meeting's discussion blamed him for the crisis between Qâsim and the Party. While accepting much of the responsibility for this, he called for "organized retreat" so that the Party's change in direction would not turn into a "rout," even though in a way this weakened his position and strengthened that of the clique's, especially after the election of Zakî Khairî and Abû-l-ᶜÎss to the Politburo as full members.

To soften the blow he had suffered, and to challenge the domination of the Party and the Party newspaper by the Clique of Four, Salâm ᶜÂdil published an editorial in *Ṭarîq al-Shaᶜb* on 2 August in which he defended the Party's position and rejected all the insinuations present in the summary of the plenary session. According to this "rebuttal":

> It was said that we believe in violence within the framework of the national movement, and in our relationship with other national forces. . . . this is fallacious and malicious, and their [those who accuse us] aim is no more than to defame us. . . . We condemn absolutely all forms of aggression against innocent people. . . . Our condemnation of these practices is a principled one.

The summary resolutions of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee revealed deep divisions within the rank and file of the Party, despite attempts to contain internal dissatisfaction with its position vis-à-vis the Qâsim regime. The ICP overlooked the regime's attacks against the Party and its cadres, and adopted a severe degree of self-criticism, which was spoken of in the Party as "self-flagellation." A change in the Party's direction was immediately evident in its newspaper editorials, so much so, in fact, that Qâsim frequently used *Ittiḥâd al-Shaᶜb* editorials to justify his attack on the Party.[72] These editorials angered many of the cadre because of their excessively conciliatory tone regarding Qâsim.[73] Four weeks after meeting, the final, detailed report of the plenary session, while still making concessions to Qâsim, attempted to explain the Party's actions:

> The Party organizations became preoccupied with fighting conspiratorial activities, so that they did not have much opportunity for indoctrination. The Party's qualitative development thus fell behind development of its numerical strength. There were other factors which militated against the Party's resolution of the problem of keeping its organizations clandestine however public its political activity was. It was this which made

[72] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ᶜÂdil*, vol. 2, p. 82.
[73] Al-Ḥâjj, *Maᶜa al-Aᶜwâm*, p. 66.

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it difficult to ensure the leadership's thorough monitoring of the Party's bases, and led to the committing of mistakes and abuses. The Party failed to stand firmly against such conduct and made mistakes as a result of the euphoria of victory and conceit resulting from its major triumphs. It thus made political miscalculations by overestimating its power and underestimating the role of the other nationalist forces, which caused it to commit leftist political errors that affected its organizational functioning. The secretary-general violated the Leninist principle of collective leadership and encroached upon the rights of the Central Committee. To the extent that collective leadership was compromised and monolithic leadership prevailed, bureaucratic tendencies emerged, and the level of criticism and self-criticism declined especially among some Party cadres who thus discredited the Party.[74]

It also acknowledged the mistake of raising the slogan of participation in government but declared that

contemporary experiences of a number of countries prove that a coalition government is the best model of political administration, and during the transitional period, this issue occupies a special importance when the representation of all national forces in government is an important factor in the struggle against the anti-government [forces]. . . . speaking in general principles, but on the practical side, our demand to participate in the national government was an error because it did not take into consideration the conditions and relations of the national forces in the country, and did not [take into account] the conditions of the revolution, and its connection to the Arab and international environment. . . . In the political situation that followed the revolution, when the government pursued an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal policy, and with this transitional government whose elements had been chosen by the leader of the revolution [himself], raising such a slogan [of communist participation in government] without [consulting] the leadership of the government was a wrong and divisive [action] that did not consider the realities of the [political situation] or its [impact] on other national forces, and has to have resulted in a fracture of the unity of the national forces and their solidarity in defending the republic.[75]

The resolutions also condemned the May Day episode and held the ICP newspaper responsible for the government's campaign against the Party. The overreaction of the Party to the NDP's announcement that it was dissolving was also condemned, as was the hasty attempt to build a national front, which was considered to have been another mistake: "It did not achieve its expected aims but rather contributed to intensifying the existing differences, and frustrated the efforts to bridge the gap between the government and the other national forces of the country."[76] The Party's open-door policy in "recruiting members

[74] A week later, a more detailed communiqué was issued in a supplement to *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* (29 August 1959) entitled "For the Sake of Strengthening the Unity of the National Forces in the Defence of the Republic and the Gains of the Revolution," which is the source referred to from now on.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

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without 'political maturity'"[77] was also acknowledged, and all these criticisms were laid at the feet of the secretary-general. The resolutions declared that

> the principle of collective leadership was violated during the past few months when the secretary-general arrogated the rights of the Central Committee to himself, as he has not convened any Central Committee meetings for the last ten months. This constituted a violation of Politburo decisions and party by-laws. . . . A number of serious and improper personal decisions were made with the consultation of only a small number of the Politburo. Some of the decisions were taken without reference to the Central Committee, and, in particular, the campaign of Party participation within the government is within the jurisdiction of the Central Committee, and not within the domain of any other organ. . . . The violation of collective leadership, and its replacement by an autocratic style, resulted in negative outcomes and grave political and organizational shortcomings that could have been avoided if the collective leadership [principle] had been practised, and the Central Committee meetings held. Holding the Central Committee meetings without the written report having been distributed beforehand is wrong, and contrary to the principle of collective leadership. . . . the violation of the principles of collective leadership was not limited to the activities of the central Party leadership, but extended to other [Party committees] in varying degrees . . . as some personal decisions were made by some of the chairmen, or a limited number of members of these committees. . . . in addition there was a scarcity of Party meetings . . . with no minutes taken . . . and no agenda prepared etc., and in some cases the meetings were proforma to approve the opinion of the chairman or the [local] bureau, rather than [meetings] to study the issues and conclude sensible decisions.[78]

The final result was that the secretary-general was reprimanded. The Clique of Four, which hoped for a rapprochement with Qâsim, now found themselves in command of the Party. Under the cloak of improving collective leadership, the clique reduced the power of Secretary-General ᶜÂdil and his supporter Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî and constituted themselves as a new Secretariat to "assist" the secretary-general with the administration of the Party. In effect, Bahâᵓu-d-Dîn Nûrî, Muḥammad Ḥusain Abû-l-ᶜÎss, and Hâdî Hâshim al-Aᶜẓamî took over the Party, but the real power remained with ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah and his henchman, Bahâᵓu-d-Dîn Nûrî.

In the meantime, overtures were made by the Party leadership early in August to implement the decisions of the plenary Central Committee meetings and to patch up matters with Qâsim through an intermediary. Thus Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, the second man in command of the Party, met with General Ismâᶜîl al-ᶜÂrif, the minister of education and a confidant of Qâsim, who had been given Qâsim's approval to meet with the ICP leadership. According to al-ᶜÂrif, al-Ḥaidarî

> initiated his discussion saying "there is a heated reactionary campaign against the Communist Party, fed by elements that are against the 14 July revolution because of the Party's faithful commitment in support of the revolution. At the same time, the security and intelligence agencies have organized a campaign against Party members and imprisoned

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

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them. Further, since the ICP cannot work against the revolution, and will continue to support its leadership, then the leadership of the revolution needs to be aware that there is a conspiracy organized against the revolution, by isolating its supporters and preparing for a deadly blow against it." Al-Ḥaidarî asked me to intervene in order to convince Qâsim of the good will of the ICP towards the revolution, in order to stop the attacks on it, and to correct this misunderstanding. . . . [Al-Ḥaidarî] stresses that he speaks in the name of the Politburo and the Central Committee.[79]

Al-ᶜÂrif adds that Qâsim was furious.[80] Qâsim believed that al-Ḥaidarî's statement was a tactic to regain his confidence, since the ICP knew that it would be publicly bankrupt without his "imagined support." Qâsim was wary of the intentions of the secretary-general whom he regarded as arrogant, and was equally aware of the ambitions of ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah. Moreover, he deprecated ᶜAbd-ul-Qâdir Ismâᶜîl al-Bustânî, who was then editor of *Ittiḥâd al-Shaᶜb* and a member of the Central Committee.[81]

In early September, the Secretariat, continuing its efforts to please Qâsim, "surprised" the Politburo by announcing that the Party's armed forces organization would be dissolved. "It was not surprising that Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî and Hâdî Hâshim al-Aᶜẓamî demanded this action. It was a surprise that the Secretary-General adopted it."[82] According to the Party's most critical members, who emerged eight years later as the Central Leadership faction[83] of the ICP (ICP-CC),[84] the battered Party came out of the July plenary session with the Clique of Four in complete control, and ready to subordinate every other consideration to "the republic's independence," to "democratic rule," and, especially, to "the restoration of solidarity with Qâsim."

> In other words, persistence in the rightist approach to clientilism and to the monolithic military government and its pressures and policies which were against the interests of the mass movement. . . . The possibility of abandoning Qâsim and seeking out other allies among other nationalist forces to rally and defend the masses was ignored. Rather than criticizing Qâsim's authoritarian actions, the resolutions of the plenary session contained justifications for more and more humiliating concessions to the regime. The leadership failed to realize that fighting against the progressive democratic forces thrust to the fore by the July 1958 revolution could not preserve the young republic.[85]

ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah, and the rest of the clique began a public campaign to prove their loyalty to Qâsim by emphasizing his leadership and their complete faith in

[79] Ismâᶜîl al-ᶜÂrif, *Asrâr Thawrat 14 Tammûz wa Ta'sîs al-Jumhûriyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq* (London: Lana Publications, 1986), p. 194.
[80] Interview by author with Ismâᶜîl al-ᶜÂrif, Washington, DC (1 December, 1965).
[81] Ibid. (4 December 1965).
[82] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûᶜî ᶜIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 228.
[83] See Chapters 4 and 5 for an examination of the emergence and role of the Central Leadership.
[84] *Al-Qiyâdah al-Markaziyyah* is translated as "Central leadership." *Al-Qiyâdah* can also be translated as "a command," but this denotes a military dimension and in this context is incorrect.
[85] Al-Ḥâjj, *Maᶜa al-Aᶜwâm*, p. 68.

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him. In his public lecture on "the political situation in Iraq," ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah stated:

> After a while the situation began to regress because of the attempt to limit the activities of the democratic movement [ICP], and the toleration [by some agencies in the government] of these reactionaries. . . . the attempt encouraged by those reactionaries in the government against the democratic forces was to sow the seeds of discord among the national forces. In this critical stage of our history, our Central Committee held a plenary session, adjusted the leftist Party policy of the previous few months and emphasized the necessity of national unity and the support of the leadership of the republic for the defence of the republic against all threats. . . . For these reasons, the plenary session's resolutions of the Central Committee spoiled the [reactionaries'] cheap designs . . . and finally, the [reactionaries] put into action their despicable but unsuccessful plot to assassinate the leader, ʿAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim.[86]

The ICP's self-criticism did little to lessen the pressure on the Party, though some respite came in the last months of 1959 when a Baʿthist assassination attempt against Qâsim on 7 October 1959 led to what appeared to be a temporary relaxation of the suppression policy against the communists. However, no amount of concessions from the ICP would bring official recognition or tolerance from the security agencies of the government.[87] The Party complained in *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* that the freedom permitted the moderate and national forces during the latter part of 1959 had allowed these forces to conduct a "fierce campaign whose ultimate intention is a conspiracy against the republic under the veil of combating communism, while repeating the same approach of Nûrî al-Saʿîd . . . with stronger hysterical overtones, and more deceit and cunning."[88]

To widen the split in the ʿÂdil leadership of the ICP, Qâsim introduced an additional element – the rehabilitation of an old enemy of ʿÂdil, Dâûd Ṣâyegh, who had left the ICP in late 1957. This was widely interpreted as a "shrewd attempt by Qâsim to resurrect an old foe of the secretary-general, who had been a member of the Central Committee until 1957, but in disagreement with ʿÂdil and ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah had been expelled."[89] The government granted Ṣâyegh permission to publish a newspaper and facilitated its publication by giving him government advertisements and subsidies. Thus, *Al-Mabdaʾ* (The Principle) was born on 21 November 1959; Qâsim further showed his support for the paper by granting it exclusive interviews, one of which appeared in its first issue. On 10 December 1959, an editorial in *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* carefully responded to Qâsim's maneuvering, hinting at its dissatisfaction and stating that:

> one of the most important aims . . . is the respect and guarantee of democratic freedoms to the people without class distinction, as long as [these democratic] forces are anti-imperialist and anti-feudal. These freedoms cannot prevail unless human rights are

[86] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (14 December, 1959).
[87] Al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 96.
[88] *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* (October 4, 1959).
[89] Interview by author with ʿAbd-ul-Raḥîm Sharîf, Baghdad (28 July, 1961).

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achieved through securing the [citizen's] humanity and integrity . . . and allowing equal opportunities to all classes to exercise their parliamentary right [to organize political parties].[90]

The Law of Association, which formally permitted the formation of political parties, was implemented on 1 January 1960. In an editorial on 4 January, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* hailed this law as "the most necessary action to defend the republic, since political parties have a mutual interest in maintaining communications among themselves and [in] proposing solutions to the political issues the [people] face." The Party wanted to assure the regime of its good intentions in cooperating with other political parties in support of the Republic. It declared that creation of a democratic political life through the formation of political parties did not mean the intensification of differences; rather, "the multiparty [environment] gives another chance for differing opinions to converge, and this will emphasize the importance of peaceful coexistence among the national forces. This coexistence requires democratic freedoms."

On 9 January 1960, Zakî Khairî and fifteen others, in compliance with the Law of Association, petitioned the government for formal permission to establish the Iraqi Communist Party.[91] On the same day, Dâûd Ṣâyegh applied for permission to form a party under the same name. Aware of this ploy, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* fiercely criticized Ṣâyegh's group, insisting "there is only one Communist Party." In its editorial the following day, 10 January, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* called the "licensing of political parties" a great step towards strengthening "the democratic path of our republic." However, Qâsim's plan to weaken the ICP still further was made clear by the government's refusal to grant it legal party status. Instead, the regime gave legal status to Dâûd Ṣâyegh's rival party, on 9 February 1960. The minister of the interior allowed the ICP to reapply on the condition that the Party revise its by-laws. It did so a month later, only to be rejected again, this time on the basis that a license had already been granted to a party that carried the same name.[92] Dâûd Ṣâyegh's *Al-Mabda'* became the licensed ICP organ; its slogan was "to firmly assure and develop our revolution, the fortress of democracy, peace and national liberation."[93] In response to these developments, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* attacked Ṣâyegh's party. In an attempt to pressure Qâsim and discredit Ṣâyegh's party, the paper organized a petition drive, which garnered about 185,000 signatures, demanding that its Party be licensed. On 15 March 1960, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* published the editorial "Basic Foundations of the Concept of National Unity," in which it asserted that the existence of classes required the formation of political parties and that for the Republic to fulfill its basic aims, it must accept this principle.

On 24 March 1960, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* complained that security agencies were continuing to arrest communists without due process. On the following day,

[90] *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* (10 December 1959).
[91] Ibid. (10 January 1960).
[92] Ibid. (9 February 1960).
[93] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyû 'î 'Irâqî*, p. 332.

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it attacked those who hid behind slogans of "moderation" and "democracy," asking, "Who would gain from the attack on democratic organizations?" Three days later, an editorial spoke of the harassment of communists by those who use "religious and nationalist fronts." On 30 March, the paper commented on the arrest of hundreds of workers and labour leaders, and on 2 April, it openly accused security agencies and officials of collusion in their organized attack on communists. During the May Day rally organized by the ICP on 1 May 1960, anti-communists and some nationalists charged into the marchers, leaving some fifty communists and ICP sympathizers injured and five dead. The police intervented and arrested a number of ICP members. On 1 June 1960, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* denounced the arrests as harassment connected to the regime's crackdown on communist activities in the labour movement. Systematic repression and the campaign of arrests and detention continual. Between February and May 1960, the communist leadership of the labour movement was effectively purged through the arrests.[94] In May 1960, all centres run by communist-supported Union of Democratic Youth, including the union's headquarters, were closed down, although the organization was not legally banned until April 1961. From early June 1960, despite Qâsim's assurances of press freedom, distribution of *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* was severely curtailed across half of the country, including in major cities, by security restrictions and police harassment.[95] On 16 September 1960, the pro-communist Student Federation was banned.[96] In a mid-June editorial, *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b*, in a display of bravado, declared: "There exists today a political conflict in the country between the anti-imperialists and anti-feudal forces and the forces of reaction that want to return the country to the days of imperialism and backwardness; within this struggle the communists have emerged as one of the most prominent forces among the national groupings."

The Party's difficulties continued, and on 14 July 1961 – the third anniversary of the 14 July 1958 revolution – *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* called for creation of a democratic, "true" parliamentary form of government, with a permanent constitution, and for an end to the transitional conditions.[97] At the same time, the pro-communist Iraqi poet, Muḥammad Mahdî al-Jawâhirî, the head of the Iraqi Press Syndicate, indirectly protested the campaign against *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* by denouncing government interference in the press.[98] However, government measures against communist organizations continued. Attacks on communists intensified in the major cities, and assassinations of prominent communists took place throughout Iraq. *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* itself was banned on 30 September 1961, and its editor was referred to a military court, thus initiating an open anti-communist purge. By the end of 1961, the ICP was mortally weakened,

94 Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 946–948.
95 *Ittiḥâd al-Sha'b* (23 June 1960).
96 Ibid. (17 September 1960).
97 Ibid. (14 July 1961).
98 Ibid. (29 July 1961).

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with its leadership split into a loyalist camp subservient to Qâsim (the Clique of Four) and an independent faction that resisted cooptation into Qâsim's political domain.

Effectively paralyzed as an independent political party, the ICP undertook a second round of public self-criticism in a futile effort to maintain unity and regain Qâsim's favour. In the winter of 1961 the Clique of Four, under the pretext of concern about his personal safety, forced the secretary-general, Salâm ʿÂdil, to go to Moscow for re-education. Zakî Khairî was appointed as co–secretary-general and took direct charge of the Party. Qâsim continued to support Ṣâyegh's bogus communist party, which was in reality a front for the regime to undermine the communist movement in Iraq. After a number of attempts to embarrass Ṣâyegh by penetrating his party, and still interested in winning favour with the Qâsim regime, the new ICP leader recognized that Qâsim had no intention of tolerating their Party. This led them to seriously consider a takeover of the bogus party, since the Ṣâyegh party was essentially a legal entity without any members and the ICP was a membership without a sanctioned structure. The ICP thought that it could control the empty structure,[99] and on the pretext of negotiating a merger, though with the intention of taking it over, Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî held discussions with the Ṣâyegh party on behalf of his Central Committee during March, April, and May 1960.[100]

Ṣâyegh insisted that he would not negotiate with the ICP without the expulsion of ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, and Secretary-General Salâm ʿÂdil, since he considered them to be responsible for the ICP's personality cults and autocratic control. However, the ICP refused such conditions. Another attempt on behalf of the ICP to reopen the dialogue was made on 5 June 1960 by ʿAzîz al-Shaikh. He conceded to Ṣâyegh's demands but with a face-saving tactic that involved the three men who Ṣâyegh's objected to asking to be relieved of their Party duties on health grounds rather than be expelled, and then Ṣâyegh's using his good offices with the government to get al-Ḥaidarî and ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah exit visas so they could join the secretary-general, who was already in Moscow.

At this point, however, Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî went behind Ṣâyegh's back to his rival, Ṣamad, who sat ʿAbd-ul-Ḥamîd on the Ṣâyegh Central Committee, with an offer to unseat Ṣâyegh and to help Ṣamad ʿAbd-ul-Ḥamîd gain control of the party.[101] Sensing these maneuvres, Ṣâyegh broke off discussions with Ṣamad, as he recognized an attempt to "freeze him out" of the party leadership.[102] At the end of June, *Al-Mabdaʾ* appealed to the cadre of the ICP to reunite the Party in the face of its enemies. A few months later, Ṣâyegh's party withered away.[103]

[99] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 231.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Interview by author with Zakî Khairî, Damascus (18 March 1987). Confirmed by ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah in an interview, London (18 January 1998).
[102] Interview by author with Dâûd Ṣâyegh, Beirut (18 July 1969).
[103] *Al-Mabdaʾ* (25 June 1960, 28 June 1960, and 3 July 1960).

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All of the anti-communist and anti-republican forces in Iraq were now rallied under the rubric of nationalism. In the process, the ICP was weakened and its effective functioning was radically curtailed. These nationalist forces were given full freedom to check the communists and, afterwards, to fill the political vacuum left by the Party's departure from the political stage, particularly as the security forces were preoccupied with their own anti-communist campaign. The security agencies and the police openly attacked communists, even those who supported Qâsim. This prompted a close Qâsim associate to warn the chief of the State Security Agency of the danger of confusing Qâsim supporters with other communists since, as he knew, the security chief had disliked communists ever since he had been an intelligence officer during the monarchy. But the security chief rejected the advice, saying, "They're all communists."[104] According to the Committee for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Rights in Iraq, which was closely associated with the communists, by the end of 1960 22,000 communists were in jail, 270 had been assassinated, and 112 communists and their supporters had been sentenced to death.

At the end of 1960 and into early 1961 there were a number of strikes by the workers in the tobacco industry and by taxi drivers. Labour unrest continued, and the government rigged labour elections to make sure that communists would not be represented in the union hierarchy. In 1961, under the pretext of fiscal restraint, the government laid off seven thousand workers, including office workers. This occurred at a time of high inflation, increasingly isolating the regime from the population.[105]

In late March 1960, the police opened fire on demonstrators protesting against tax increases, killing a number of them. The communists were accused of instigating the demonstrations and a campaign of repression followed. Evaluating the three-year regime of Qâsim, the *World Marxist Review* commented that the regime had "wiped out the democratic freedoms won by the people,"[106] adding that "the government's anti-democratic policy is aimed at strengthening the dictatorship of the national bourgeoisie, at solving the social contradictions in favour of the bourgeoisie, and at placating the counter-revolutionary elements with a view to eliminating the danger of conspiracies on their part."[107]

The Fall of the Clique of Four

International events in 1961 saw the Qâsim regime increasingly isolated. Qâsim, who considered the 1899 agreement between Kuwait and Britain to be illegal since it usurped Iraq's historic rights to Kuwait, declared in June 1961 Kuwait to be an integral part of Iraq. By 1 July 1961 Iraq had stationed its armies on the border with Kuwait, and Britain immediately responded by sending in

[104] Al-ᶜÂrif, *Asrâr Thawrat 14 Tammûz wa Taʾsîs al-Jumhûriyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, pp. 409–410.
[105] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyû ᶜî ᶜIrâqî*, p. 338.
[106] *World Marxist Review*, vol. 4, no. 6 (June 1961), p. 89.
[107] Ibid., p. 88.

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British forces, along with a symbolic contingent of Saudi Arabians, to defend the Emirate. With Kuwait's admission to the Arab League on 20 July 1961, the Arab League also decided to send in a military force, consisting of soldiers from four Arab countries, to replace the British, and between September and October, twenty-three hundred soldiers from Sudan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAR guarded the Emirate. In response, Qâsim broke off diplomatic relations with all countries that recognized the newly independent Kuwait, thereby increasing Iraq's isolation both within the Arab world and internationally.[108]

The weakening of the Qâsim regime was exacerbated by the state's increasing oppression of the Kurds. When Qâsim first came to power in 1958 the new Republic guaranteed the national rights of the Kurds (Article 3 of the Provisional Constitution), removed restrictions against Kurdish political activism, and welcomed Muṣṭafâ Bârzânî, the Kurdish leader, to Baghdad as a hero. However, by 1960 Qâsim had turned against Bârzânî and the Kurdish Democratic Party, and a campaign against Kurdish political leaders was initiated. Bârzânî was forced to flee Baghdad in the spring of 1961 and return to Barzan, his tribal stronghold. Despite Bârzânî's efforts to mend fences with Qâsim, government harassment of Barzan increased. On 9 September 1961, Qâsim's regime authorized aerial bombardment of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, and a full-scale Kurdish rebellion erupted on 11 September.[109] Reflecting on these events forty years later, the Kurdish leader Masʿûd Bârzânî (the son of Mullah Muṣṭafâ Bârzânî) pointed out:

> It is not just or fair that we place all the responsibility [for this] on Qâsim. We cannot blame him for all the criminal acts and atrocities committed against the Kurdish people. There were two other parties that share some of the responsibility. I must admit that our dealings with Qâsim and his regime very often were short-sighted and not astute. Our actions were hasty, immature, and narrow-minded, and did not take into account their potential to endanger Qâsim's regime. Sometimes we acted as if we were a state within a state, [in effect] giving him cause to worry about the threat to national unity, and provoking the [Arab] chauvinists surrounding him . . . into creating mistrust between Qâsim and Mullah Muṣṭafâ Bârzânî, the Kurdish Democratic Party, and the Kurdish people.[110]

To deal with the deteriorating situation, the remaining members of the Central Committee of the ICP met in November 1961 to address the conditions in northern Iraq, the crisis over Kuwait, and the ongoing oppression of the ICP. According to final report "the common feature between [the Iraqi government]

[108] For details of the Qâsim actions on Kuwait, see al-ʿÂrif, *Asrâr Thawrat 14 Tammûz wa Taʾsîs al-Jumhûriyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, pp. 305–314.

[109] Ismet Sheriff Vanly, "Kurdistan in Iraq," in Gerard Chaliand (ed.), *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993), pp. 150–152. For details for the split between Qâsim and Bârzânî, see Muḥsin Dizaiyyi, *Aḥdâth ʿÂṣartuhâ*, vol. 1 (Erbil: Dar Aras, 2001), pp. 180–182; al-ʿÂrif, *Asrâr Thawrat 14 Tammûz wa Taʾsîs al-Jumhûriyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, pp. 396–402.

[110] Masʿûd al-Bârzânî, *Al-Bârzânî wa al-Ḥarakah al-Taḥarruriyyah al-Kurdiyyah*, vol. 3 (Arbil: Iraqi Kurdistan Ministry of Education Press, 2002), p. 8.

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and the government of the old regime centres around its animosity towards democracy, communism, the Kurdish people's national [liberation] movement, and all popular forms of public organization along with public freedoms."[111]

Since the Party had been without a newspaper for more than a year, the Central Committee decided to re-issue the clandestine pre-Qâsim *Ṭarîq al-Shaʿb*, which had ceased publication once *Ittiḥâd al-Shaʿb* was established under the free press laws. However, Zakî Khairî, the de facto secretary-general (who was now in charge of the Party), and his Central Committee and Politburo rejected any decisive action on the domestic level, such as support for the Kurdish rebellion or (as communist officers in the Iraqi Air Force had suggested) the use of force to topple Qâsim. In a letter to the KDP on 6 June 1962 he articulated the reasons for the Party's rejection of the proposed to topple Qâsim:

> Using force against a nationalist anti-imperialist government in the current situation, by a democratic party, will result, in the best of situations, in two possibilities, [one] either the existing regime will throw itself in the lap of imperialism and ally itself with all the reactionary forces in order to fight this [anti-government] movement, or [two], the imperialists and their agents will exploit this chance to overthrow the existing government and establish a reactionary government which will wipe out all the people's gains.[112]

The temporary leadership of the ICP thus proved ineffective. The Party was in disarray and increasingly losing popular support. Its cadres were demoralized, with many in prison, and its enemies, both nationalist and reactionary, were in control of the Iraqi political arena.

In September 1962, after a year and a half of enforced exile, Salâm ʿÂdil, accompanied by his comrade al-Ḥaidarî, returned from Moscow to Iraq and this environment. ʿÂdil immediately took charge and attempted to revitalize Iraq's communist movement. He convened a Plenary Session of the Central Committee, at which it was decided that ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah and Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî would be removed from all leadership positions and their memberships on the Central Committee frozen pending the results of the Party's investigations of their activities during the previous three years. The plenary session also stripped Zakî Khairî of all his Politburo posts and reduced him to the status of an active Party member assigned to the Middle Euphrates section. Muḥammad Ḥusain Abû-l-Îss was also stripped of his positions on the Central Committee, and Thâbit Ḥabîb al-ʿÂnî's position as the reserve nominee for the Central Committee was frozen. Explaining the reasons for these actions, the final communiqué of the plenary session noted:

> The role of the Party in the past three years grew strong, side by side with the combating of opportunism. This reached its peak, especially in the struggle against subservience, indecisiveness, surrenderism, and liquidationism . . . which had seeped into the Party under different slogans and concepts. . . . these currents expressed themselves . . . in

[111] As quoted in al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 98.
[112] Ibid., p. 99.

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a dangerous way inside the Party leadership, and in particular . . . grew in the Politburo in a parallel line to the creation and growth of the anti-Party front. This group formed a firm opposition front inside the leadership, borrowing concepts, criteria, slogans, and means . . . from the outside anti-Party front. To achieve its objectives the opposition groups in the Politburo tried to conceal their [real] intent under the cloak of demanding change in the leadership, and followed the route of violating Party by-laws by combining to obstruct the work of the leadership. The opportunist, opposition clique composed of comrades Muḥammad (ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah), Nihâd (Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî), Thâmir (Muḥammad Ḥusain Abû-l-ᶜÎss) and Jandal (Zakî Khairî) obstructed the efforts of the leadership to analyze the situation in the country, and further obstructed the leadership from implementing a well-thought-out, and carefully considered, plan of retreat from a policy by the [Clique of Four] which was imposed on the Party, and which bonded the destiny of the Party and its future to that [bourgeois] stage, adapting Party slogans, policies, and the composition of its leadership according to the interests of the ruling bourgeoisie. The opportunistic opposition clique [Clique of Four] worked to exaggerate those mistakes, and exploited them to distort the face of the leadership and Party. . . . it did not stop with that, but stubbornly continued working to belittle the vanguard role of the CPSU in the international movement for the purpose of nationalist bourgeois thinking on this issue. The same thing applies to the Kurdish national question and the issue of Kuwait.[113]

Ironically, Salâm ᶜÂdil used the same charge that the Clique of Four had used to freeze him out of the Party hierarchy when they sent him and al-Ḥaidarî to Moscow. At the conclusion of the meeting, a new Secretariat was chosen, composed of Salâm ᶜÂdil, who served as first secretary and was in charge of the Baghdad and Central Military Organizations; Hâdî Hâshim al-Aᶜẓamî, who emerged as the Party's second in command and was in charge of the labour unions; Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî in charge of the Peasants' Bureau; and George Tallû, in charge of foreign relations and the international communist movement. The Politburo was now composed of Muḥammad Ṣâliḥ al-ᶜAblî, in charge of internal communications; ᶜAzîz Muḥammad, in charge of the Kurdish Branch Committee; and ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm al-Naṣirî, responsible for Baghdad although he was in Moscow at the time.[114] Responding immediately, Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî complied with the decision by expressing his complete agreement with the Party's decisions. Abû-l-ᶜÎss also wrote a very detailed self-criticism, accepting blame and explaining:

The reason for the vacillation of [our] opposition was to satisfy the Prime Minister ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm Qâsim more than we should, and the apprehension that mass action . . . would become an anti-dictatorship and anti-police condition. . . . I fully concur with the report of the secretary-general, approve of his aims, and support all the measures he has suggested against me, regardless of how harsh they may be, after they are finally decided by Party organs. On this basis, I condemn the opportunist, opposition clique. I condemn all four of them, including myself. I condemn its thoughts, tendencies, and its means, and all their deleterious actions, and I bear a large personal responsibility for

[113] Yûsuf and Khâlid, *Salâm ᶜÂdil*, vol. 2, pp. 329–330.
[114] Al-Kharasân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, pp. 100–101.

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strengthening the clique by joining it, and working actively with it. I am responsible for their actions collectively and individually, even those actions that I did not participate in. I bear responsibility for the opportunistic, surrenderist and rightist views. . . . I bear responsibility for the hysteric activities of Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî prior to the plenary session of 1959. . . . I feel my responsibility and the responsibility of comrade Zakî Khairî were extremely grave because of the harmful role our joining the opposition had in encouraging Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî and ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, and in helping them to cloak their surrenderist, liquidationist objectives, and influencing other comrades in the Central Committee and Politburo.[115]

A more sober evaluation from other members of the Central Committee, and from historians of the Party, concludes that the Party leadership was overoccupied with the so-called Clique of Four. This episode could have had a dramatic effect on the "party's policy towards Qasim . . . and there were a number of factors (political, social, and so on) that exacerbated the episode; the Iraqi Communist Party would pay dearly in the future."[116]

The Fall of Qâsim

Shortly after these developments, Salâm ʿÂdil began to prepare the Party for peaceful opposition to Qâsim by encouraging strikes and demonstrations against police oppression, and by condemning the Iraqi army's harshness towards the Kurdish people, who were by then in full rebellion against the government. *Ṭarîq al-Shaʿb*, echoing these new policies in January 1963, declared:

Conditions in Kurdistan are similar to a country occupied by a foreign invader's forces, in which a policy of vengeance is practised without the restraints of decency, conscience, or honour. Cities and villages were wiped out, citizens in a great number of cases were killed to terrorize the population or with no reason, and thousands of peaceful homes were attacked, their contents looted and their valuables divided among high-ranking officers. In addition, scores of women were violated, and children and the elderly lived in constant fear. In this environment, and because of the Kurdish war, taxes were increased by the government and inflation climbed. Qâsim's progressive measures, especially as they related to agrarian reform, were reduced to appease the landlords and sheikhs . . . as their reforms were considered to be a communist measure.

To put the Party's new direction into action the returning leadership took an active role in asserting its independence and increasing its public support and credibility with the masses. Departing from their previous veiled criticisms, the leadership now openly attacked the Qâsim regime. It issued a boldly worded directive to all Party branches initiating steps

to reactivate the mass struggle, especially among workers, poor peasants, and revolutionary democratic forces, . . . against military dictatorship, . . . [to] educate the comrades and

[115] Complete Report, reproduced in *Aḍwâʾ ʿAlâ al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûʿiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Mirṣâd, n.d.), pp. 162–171.

[116] ʿAzîz Sibâhî, *ʿUqûd min Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî* (Damascus: Thaqâfah al-Jadîdah Publication, 2003), vol. 2, pp. 473–474.

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organizations on the weakness of the governing military dictatorship . . . and [to] educate the masses to struggle against isolationism and actively work to solve the Kurdish crisis on a democratic basis.[117]

With the Qâsim regime's isolation at both the regional and the international levels, the increasing oppression of the regime's police agencies, and the regime's harsh treatment of the ICP, Qâsim was left without any organized public support and had to depend heavily on his supporters in the army. The race then began among opposition political parties to cultivate the support of disaffected army officers for the numerous opposition groups awaiting the regime's demise; at the same time, many officers were looking around for ideological groups that they thought had some chance of toppling the regime. Thus, the Baʿth Party sponsored school strikes on 29 December 1962, which escalated into a nationwide movement. The communists, caught between their enemies – the Qâsim regime, on the one hand, and the Baʿthists and their Arab nationalist allies, who considered the communists responsible for the evils of Qâsim's regime (including Qâsim's actions in Iraqi and Arab politics), on the other – now found themselves fighting both for their lives and for the survival of the very government that was responsible for their oppression.

On 3 January 1963, the ICP warned of an impending coup and called on all its members to be on the alert. A month later, with the help of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the regime unleashed a witch-hunt in classic Cold War fashion, with a list supplied by the agency of alleged communists that included all progressive forces (communists, leftists, Kassemites). Over ten thousand individuals were detained, and between three thousand and five thousand were executed. In the early morning of 8 February 1963, an army coup led by the Baʿthists overthrew the Qâsim government. US National Security Council member Robert Komer told President John F. Kennedy, "The coup is a gain for our side."[118] ʿAbd-ul-Salâm ʿÂrif, Qâsim's revolutionary comrade turned political foe, who had aligned himself with the Nasserites, was installed as president and leader of a military-style junta. He gave the coup a nationalist stamp, automatically winning the support of the UAR. Salâm ʿÂdil reacted by issuing a declaration that called for the masses to rally in support of the Republic and Qâsim. On the same day, to show its deep-seated distrust of communism, the new government broadcast Declaration 13, which called upon all Iraqis "to annihilate all communists wherever they exist."

Despite the crackdown, the communists were able to muster a three-day resistance in some quarters of Baghdad and Basra and in some areas of the Middle Euphrates, even after Qâsim's death at the hands of the army on 9 February. With the coup, a wholesale slaughter of communists and their sympathizers began. Thousands were arrested and tortured by "special committees" and by the Baʿthist militia known as the National Guard. The campaign of terror that

[117] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 344.
[118] Mark Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 83.

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ensured mixed personal, sectarian, and tribal hatreds. The new government initiated systematic torture, and, as one eyewitness graphically described it:

People's legs were chopped off, piece by piece, . . . children's eyes were bound with ropes until their eyelashes were pushed into their eyeballs, women were beaten and sexually violated, and children were tortured in front of their parents. The torturers used tin snips to cut the hands, legs, and face muscles slowly. . . . Scores of victims were crowded into small rooms; [they were] forced to stand on one leg for a number of hours, and water from sewers was thrown on the wounds of the tortured. Others were left without water or food for days and [their] wounds [predictably] became infected. . . . other victims, both men and women, [were] hung upside down on ceiling fans for days, . . . and others were burned with hot metal objects, their bones broken by iron bars or their eyes blinded by cigarette butts or fingers. Nails were pulled off and electrified cattle prods [were] used to inflict pain.[119]

The secretary-general was arrested on 18 February after his second-in-command, Hâdî Hâshim al-Aʿẓamî had – under torture – informed the coup leaders of his hideout. The Baʿthists refused Salâm ʿÂdil's attempts to open a dialogue,[120] and according to eyewitnesses, he was tortured for fifteen days:

clubbed, hung from his feet to the ceiling, dropped unconscious headfirst, and then his legs were slashed and salt rubbed into the wounds. . . . almost all of his bones were broken; he was then thrown into a dank dungeon . . . naked, handcuffed, and left [in the coldest days of the year]. . . . He was deprived of food and sleep. . . . His eyes were squeezed until blood began to flow. . . . finally, he was crushed under a steam roller.[121]

All but three of the other members of the Central Committee and Politburo were also arrested and met fates similar to ʿÂdil's; on 7 March 1963 the government declared that they had all been executed. In addition, Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, Ṣâliḥ al-ʿAblî, and ʿAbd-ul-Jabbâr Wahbî, who had eluded capture and assumed the "central Party leadership," were arrested and executed on 20 July 1963.

The atrocities and torture employed by the new Baʿthist regime, in which its leading members and most of its cabinet participated, were substantiated in the treatment of the ICP leadership after their arrests. Testimonies by Baʿthist leaders of that period, documented forty years later, tell a gruesome tale. One army officer who was a member of the Baʿth Military Bureau recounted:

I visited ʿAmmâr ʿAlwash in the Nihâyah Palace where he was supervising the communist interrogations, and found with him ʿAbd-ul-Karîm al-Shaikhlî [later to become foreign minister under Saddam Hussein before being executed by him] and Khâlid Ṭabrah [later a general director in Saddam Hussein's regime]. I was surprised to find ʿAbd-ul-Jabbâr Wahbî [a member of the Central Committee and a professor of physics at Baghdad University] lying on the ground and at the point of death, asking for water. Ṭabrah responded "you pimp, you want water" and none was given.

[119] "A Terrifying Report on Iraq," *Al-Ghad*, no. 3 (Prague, July 1964), p. 84.
[120] Al-Fakaikî, *Awkâr al-Hazîmah*, p. 262, and ʿAlî Karîm Saʿîd, *ʿIrâq 8 Shibât, 1963: Min Ḥiwâr al-Mafâhîm Ilâ Ḥiwâr al-Dam* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kunûz al-Adabiyyah, 1999), pp. 194–198.
[121] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 386.

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Also forty years later, another detainee, a Kurdish medical doctor, corroborated this story, but with more details:

> I saw ʿAbd-ul-Jabbâr Wahbî having his leg sawn off at the knee, and next to him I saw another person, one of whose arms had been sawn off, and who was hanging from the roof by the other.[122]

In the meantime, the Baʿthists began to reverse Qâsim's progressive internal policies, such as those related to agrarian reform and to foreign control of the oil industry. They reopened the door to Western economic penetration and suspended many agreements for technical and economic cooperation with socialist countries. By bringing Iraq back into the sphere of Western influence and withdrawing from the socialist and non-aligned blocs, they plunged the country more deeply into the Cold War.

On the regional level, at least in the early days of the coup, Iraq was brought closer to Nasser, and on 17 April 1963 the new regime initialled an agreement that joined Iraq, Egypt, and the Baʿthist regime in Syria (which had come to power only a month earlier) in a Tripartite Pact of Unity. However, only a few weeks later the honeymoon between Nasser and the Iraqi Baʿthists was over. The Baʿthists were not interested in surrendering their power over Iraq to a united Arab state under the leadership of Nasser, and ever since Syria's withdrawal from the UAR in September 1961, Nasser did not trust Baʿthist intentions. The tension between Nasser and the Iraqi Baʿthists gradually translated into a conflict between the Baʿthists, on the one hand, and the Nasserites and nationalist army officers, on the other, and culminated in a wholesale purge by the new Baʿthist regime of the nationalists and the Nasserites and their supporters. In November 1963 a split between moderate and extremist Baʿthists over the policies regarding Nasser and Arab unity exacerbated the situation, with the result that President ʿAbd-ul-Salâm ʿÂrif, helped by moderate Baʿthists, nationalists, and Nasserites, purged the extreme Baʿthists, thereby initiating another short-lived honeymoon with the UAR. Although ʿÂrif continued to pay lip service to Nasser's programme for union, he soon began a complete purge of the Baʿth from the government.

The Rashid Putsch and the Death Train

The anti-communist fever that followed the Baʿthist coup in Iraq was criticized, retrospectively, by the more progressive elements within the Baʿth leadership, who quietly blamed this anti-communist revenge on the chauvinism of ʿÂrif and the conservatives, as well as of army officers and civilian officials. In general, however,

> the core leadership did not dissociate itself from the violence, or condemn it officially or publicly. Rather, it attempted to prevaricate, and even [to] hide that fact. Nevertheless,

[122] ʿAlî Karîm Saʿîd, *Al-ʿIrâq: Al-Biriyah al-Musallaḥah: Ḥarakat Ḥasan Sarîʿ wa Qiṭâr al-Mawt*. (Beirut: al-Furât Publishing House, 2002), p. 59.

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the death of Salâm ᶜÂdil and others under torture annoyed some members of the leadership because of their fear of an international and local backlash, though some felt that the speed with which ᶜÂdil was eliminated may have been the result of news leaks, suggesting that he was, in fact, in dialogue with [some] of the civilian Baᶜth leadership . . . which some of the military leadership opposed, fearing a positive response.[123]

Though the Baᶜth atrocities and oppression after their 1963 coup decimated the ICP and left it in disarray, some limited and isolated pockets of ICP organization in the army and among workers remained intact. A few weeks after the coup, these groups started to communicate with one another, with military cells contacting workers' cells belonging to the Baghdad "Workers' Committee" of the ICP. Prior to the coup the Baghdad section had the reputation of being militant and had even challenged official ICP policies. Ibrâhîm Muḥammad ᶜAlî was a leader of the Workers' Central Committee, which was connected directly to the Party's Central Committee and controlled over fifty major labour unions. The committee permeated the working class in Baghdad and throughout the rest of the country. ᶜAlî belonged to a smaller Workers' Committee that had not been decimated by the coup,[124] and he was determined that his committee should act as if it were the Party. However, he continued to seek legitimacy, and he searched for the actual Party leadership of al-ᶜAblî, al-Ḥaidarî, and Wahbî until their murders became public.[125]

Ibrâhîm Muḥammad ᶜAlî attempted to gather in what was left of the other civilian cells; he assigned the task of organizing the cells in the army to a coffee shop worker, Muḥammad Ḥabîb (Abû Salâm), who did manage to connect with Corporal Ḥasan Sarîᶜ, the head of one of the army cells. However, Party turncoats eventually delivered ᶜAlî to the Security Services, and he died under torture without revealing any information. His death left control of the civilian cells as well as of the army cells to Ḥabîb, who, with the same vigour as Ḥasan Sarîᶜ had shown, continued to organize the revolutionary committee *al-Lajnah al-Thawriyyah*. The Sarîᶜ group within the army was organizing itself for military action, whereas Ḥabîb "prepared the political and popular grounds" for this action. In this way, "the civilians prepared the ground for the rebellion by mobilizing any who would be able to carry arms, enter the al-Rashid army camp, and help the soldiers execute the plan," which was to mobilize the imprisoned communists and Qâsim supporters and to overthrow the ᶜÂrif regime.[126]

Muḥammad Ḥabîb and Ḥasan Sarîᶜ, two corporals belonging to the ICP, and a tailor named Ḥâfiẓ Laftah, asked the remaining members of the ICP-CC for direction and informed it of their readiness to revolt. The Central Committee rejected their plan, ordered them to abandon the action, and reprimanded them, describing their proposals as "violations of principles, and in contradiction

[123] Al-Fakaikî, *Awkâr al-Hazîmah*, p. 264.
[124] Saᶜîd, *Al-ᶜIrâq*, p. 41.
[125] Ibid., pp. 33–37.
[126] Ibid., p. 297.

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to Party discipline."[127] However, Muḥammad Ḥabîb did not reveal the Central Committee's response to his group and continued the planning with Sarîʿ, leading him to believe that they were working in coordination with the Party leadership and with its blessing. The plan focused on the non-commissioned officers, who were to seize the military camps and then hand over command to the detained leftist officers and political leaders. They believed that such a plan was plausible, knowing, first, that those officers thought in similar political and social terms to them, and second, that if they did not move quickly, they would not have another chance.[128]

At dawn on 3 July 1963, the plotters, in conjunction with the remnants of the Baghdad and Middle Euphrates sections of the Party, mobilized two thousand troops, and were able to take over the most important military camp in Baghdad with the aim of liberating around one thousand army officers who were in detention at that time. The plotters planned to hand over power to the freed officers, who would then take over the leadership of the revolt. But although they succeeded in taking over the entire base at al-Rashid, the rebels met unexpected resistance from the prison guards and were unable to free the officers. This delayed the officers' scheduled arrival at pre-arranged units, which would have initiated the second phase of the uprising during which, according to the plan, the revolt would spread to other army camps. With this unexpected setback, the other units did not join in the revolt, even though the rebels had managed to detain the most important group among the political leadership, that is, the minister of the interior and Baʿth Party secretary-general of the regional command, the minister of foreign affairs, and all the camp's commanding officers, not to mention the entire leadership of the Baʿth Party's militia, the National Guard. The plan was detailed, carefully thought out, and daring,

> and its chances of success were high. However, some simple mishaps resulted in delaying the freedom of the imprisoned officers which limited the spread of the revolt, thus giving the government the time needed to respond and causing the revolutionaries to lose the element of surprise and initial momentum.[129]

The delay restricted the revolt to the one military camp only, and enabled the government to isolate the rebels.

Four decades later, the most detailed and documented work to assess the revolt and the responsibility for its failure concluded that the "evidence" comes down against Muḥammad Ḥabîb for his deception, arrogance, and animosity towards the leadership of the ICP. As already noted, Ḥabîb convinced Ḥasan Sarîʿ that he had the complete confidence and support of the Party and that he

[127] Khairî and Khairî, *Dirâsât fî Târîkh al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûʿî al-ʿIrâqî*, p. 414. See also Bâqir Ibrâhîm [al-Mûsawî], *Mudhakkarât Bâqir Ibrâhîm* (Beirut: Dâr al-Ṭaliʿah, 2002), p. 101.
[128] Saʿîd, *Al-ʿIrâq*, p. 44. For more details, see pp. 48–206.
[129] Saʿîd, *ʿIrâq 8 Shibât 1963: Min Ḥiwâr al-Mafâhîm Ilâ Ḥiwâr al-Dam*, p. 295.

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spoke in the name of the Party leadership.[130] Bâqir Ibrâhîm al-Mûsawî, who took charge of the Party soon after the failed revolt, supports this assessment:

> There was a direct connection between the failure of the al-Rashid camp revolt and the renewal of the campaign of terror against the Party, as more than once a delegate from the leadership of the [attempted coup] movement contacted me . . . and spoke on behalf of the Party leadership without revealing the names of the [ICP] leaders so I could trust [the delegate]. I noticed that they were speaking with full confidence of an impending revolution and asked us to prepare for it. We promised them to do so. . . . then we heard from the cadre station [about] the failure of the revolt. We learned later more details on communication between the leader of the revolt, Muḥammad Ḥabîb, with al-ʿAblî, who tried hard to persuade Ḥabîb to wait and avoid adventurism, . . . however [al-ʿAblî] failed. . . . With the failure of the revolt, security pressures succeeded, on 7 July, in arresting Ṣabîh Mubârak and ʿAdnân ʿAbd-ul-Qâdir, the liaison members between the revolt and the [Party] leadership. These two led security forces to the hideout of the three leaders who were then arrested.[131]

What followed the failure of the coup was a ruthless hunt for and attack against the remnants of the ICP. Moreover, this unleashed the Baʿth security forces on the detained officers, now believed to be a threat to the Baʿth regime, since it assumed that had the officers been able to take command, the revolt could well have succeeded. Thus ʿAbd-ul-Salâm ʿÂrif insisted that "they must be killed" to eliminate any hope of utilizing them in a future military action against the state.[132] ʿÂrif was able to convince Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr of this view, and al-Bakr called upon his military colleagues to arrange for the executions to be carried out at the notorious desert prison of Nuqrat al-Salmân outside Baghdad.

Some in the civilian Baʿth leadership objected to this plan and wanted to limit the executions to around thirty of the officers, given that most of them had had no knowledge of the plot. Nevertheless, several Baʿthist army officers wanted all of them to be executed, and they were successful in convincing al-Bakr to send them all to the desert prison while their fate was being determined. All were shipped in chains, crowded together in a cattle train (that would later be called "the Death Train") in 120°F heat, for the six-hour journey into the desert. However, when the driver of the train realized that his cargo consisted of people, he more than doubled the speed of his train. Because his action meant that the train arrived at its destination in two hours (instead of in six), people were able to meet it with food and water for the prisoners. And since some of the men on the train were doctors or had medical training, only one of the officers died because of the trip.[133]

The aftermath of the revolt and the government crackdown left the Party leaderless, as all its resources had been concentrated in Baghdad. The Kurdish and Middle Euphrates sections remained intact, and thus the leadership passed

[130] Ibid., pp. 154–156.
[131] Bâqir Ibrâhîm [al-Mûsawî], *Mudhakkarât Bâqir Ibrâhîm*, p. 101.
[132] Saʿîd, *ʿIrâq 8 Shibât 1963*, pp. 302–305.
[133] Ibid., p. 303.

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primarily to the experienced but unprepared leaders of these two sections, ʿAzîz Muḥammad and Bâqir Ibrâhîm al-Mûsawî, both of whom were forced to shoulder the rebuilding of the ICP. Even though the revolt was unsuccessful, and its immediate impact on the Party was disastrous, some scholars consider it to have been the beginning of an armed struggle in Iraq in which the Partisan Marshes uprising of May 1968, five years later, was "nothing more than an extension of the new approach created by the al-Rashid uprising."[134]

[134] Saʿîd, *Al-ʿIrâq*, p. 208.

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3

Party Rift

The Emergence of the Central Leadership

The Iraqi Communist Party remained popular with the Iraqi people despite the elimination of virtually its entire leadership and organization following the failed 1963 revolt. This allowed several attempts to rejuvenate the Party to take place. During the first few weeks after the 1963 Baʿthist coup, the remnants of the Central Committee and Politburo – Jamâl al-Ḥaidarî, Muḥammad Ṣâliḥ al-ʿAblî, and ʿAbd-ul-Jabbâr Wahbî – continued running Party affairs in Baghdad under the name the Bureau of Central Organization. They attempted to re-establish communication with the scattered membership of the embattled Party and began to rebuild the Party's apparatus. But, on 21 July 1963, they too were arrested and summarily executed.

To fill the vacuum that resulted and direct what was left of the Party, a replacement leadership was hastily constituted, led by Bâqir Ibrâhîm al-Mûsawî, the only surviving member of the Politburo in Iraq, who had been the Politburo official in charge of the Party's Middle Euphrates section. This state of confusion, however, did not extend to the Kurdish branch of the ICP, which, being located in the rebellious northern Kurdish areas, was left virtually intact. The branch had established good working relations with other Kurdish groups, particularly with the KDP and its leader Mullah Muṣṭafâ Bârzânî, who had initiated a rebellion against the Qâsim regime in 1961. After the Party's 1962 plenary session, Salâm ʿÂdil's Central Committee instructed the Kurdish branch to replace the Central Committee in case of an emergency or if for any reason it ceased to function normally. The efforts of al-Mûsawî in Baghdad therefore were advanced by the Party members located in Iraqi Kurdistan. The ongoing rebellion, and the general inability of government forces to control territory in the north, enabled Party members based in the north to begin the painstaking work needed to reconstruct the Party apparatus, to reconnect disparate and fearful Party members isolated in the rest of the country, and to begin the long process of building relations with the international communist movement.

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This effort to build a bridge between the emerging Party of the 1960s and the international movement became critical, since clear signs of a Soviet policy shift were evident by the time of the ᶜÂrif-led coup of 18 November 1963. Altering its position towards the developing world in general, and towards the Arab world and the UAR in particular, Moscow demonstrated a pronounced effort to portray the ᶜÂrif regime in a positive light. Ṣâliḥ Mahdî Duglah, a Central Committee member from the Baghdad section of the ICP and a close Iraqi observer of Soviet politics, who was then residing in Moscow, noted:

> An intellectual foundation for a closer relationship between the Arab communist movement and Nasserism resulted. This orientation was sensed by some leaders of the ICP who exaggerated the [potential] of a relationship. . . . For the purpose of propagating this, and strengthening it, the Arab communist parties in Prague held a conference in the summer of 1964.[1]

These Soviet overtures were welcomed by the ᶜÂrif regime, and a month later its foreign minister informed the Soviet ambassador that he expected the "strained relations" between the two countries soon to become a thing of the past.[2] This was despite the draconian anti-communist measures that continued to be taken by the Iraqi regime, and despite the fact that the ICP's temporary leaders and its Kurdish leaders both continued to condemn the ᶜÂrif regime as an anti-progressive extension of the overthrown Baᶜthist regime.

This shift in the Soviet position signalled the beginning of a divorce between the policies of the CPSU and those of the USSR as a state, irrespective of any government's treatment of local communists. Such a disconnection had been evident, for example, in the Soviet policy towards the UAR throughout the three previous years, despite the UAR's oppression of communist parties. It was an abandonment of the notion of socialist fraternity, and as such, it bewildered communist true believers and initiated a critical evaluation of the USSR throughout the Arab world, while further intensifying discussions among the cadre and the leadership of the ICP. This had a profound impact on the ICP as a whole in the years to come, causing the most serious split in the ICP's history and haunting the Party until the end of the century.

At the same time, the leadership of the ᶜÂrif coup tried to project the appearance of a progressive regime, a fantasy made much easier with Soviet recognition. On the internal level, the ᶜÂrif regime dissociated itself from the atrocities of the Baᶜthist-led regime that immediately followed the coup. It attempted to settle the Kurdish rebellion, initiating negotiations through the good offices of President Nasser of Egypt that eventually concluded on 10 February 1964 in a ceasefire with the KDP and its leader, Muṣṭafâ Bârzânî. The USSR continued its flirtation with the ᶜÂrif regime and warmly endorsed the Kurdish ceasefire

[1] Ṣâliḥ Mahdî Duglah, *Min al-Dhâkirah: Sîrat Ḥayât* (Nicosea, Cyprus, Dar al-Mada, 2000), p. 146.

[2] *Pravda* (Moscow, 21 December 1963).

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through a congratulatory message sent by Premier Khrushchev to ᶜÂrif.[3] The new regime also took concrete measures to align itself more closely with the UAR, and the Nasserite influence in Iraq increased dramatically. During Nikita Khrushchev's visit to Egypt on 26 May 1964, ᶜÂrif signed an Iraq-UAR agreement with Nasser in Cairo that created a Joint Presidential Council to oversee the coordination of social, economic, political, and military affairs between Egypt and Iraq in preparation for their eventual unification. Six weeks later, on 14 July, in what appeared to be an implementation of the agreement with the UAR, the Iraqi government took two steps in this direction.[4] First, on the economic front, it nationalized all banks and insurance companies, as well as thirty-two large industrial and commercial complexes, and created an Economic Organization for Banks to oversee the nationalized enterprises. These actions were similar to the socialist measures taken by Egypt earlier in 1961, and they aligned Iraq's economic structure largely with that of Egypt. Second, the Arab Socialist Union was created in Iraq and modelled after Egypt's official party organization, the Arab Socialist Union.[5] Another apparent step towards union occurred three months later, on 16 October, when the Joint Presidential Council was replaced by a Unified Political Command intended to oversee the unification process over the following two years.

Iraqi relations with the UAR quickly began to cool, however, and by September 1964 they were strained as a result of an attempted pro-Nasserist coup by ᶜÂrif's prime minister, Air Brigadier General ᶜÂrif ᶜAbd-ul-Razzâq. Razzâq served as the acting president while ᶜÂrif was attending an Arab summit conference in Casablanca on 15 September 1964. After order was restored and the coup leaders exiled to Cairo, a break with Nasser gradually developed. Publicly, the number of Nasserite cabinet members doubled from three to six by 14 November 1964, and they soon held the most important portfolios, giving the lie to ᶜÂrif's disillusionment.[6] The Soviets considered this to be a further sign that ᶜÂrif headed a progressive regime that was attempting "to raise the revolutionary struggle to a higher level," even though anti-communist and anti-Soviet publications were still spreading throughout Iraq, and the implementation of the Kurdish ceasefire remained largely ineffective. Despite events on the ground, the Soviet Union continued to support the ᶜÂrif regime,[7] and it resumed its arms shipments, which had been interrupted during the first Baᶜthist coup eighteen months earlier.

The ICP continued with efforts to rebuild the Party, wavering between condemning the regime for its anti-democratic, anti-communist stance and trying to find an accommodation with the new ᶜÂrif regime. The Soviets continued their public pronouncements in support of the regime, declaring its domestic policies to be progressive and endorsing it as anti-imperialist. Though Soviet approval

[3] *Tass* (Moscow, 15 February 1964).
[4] *Al-Ahram* (Cairo, 27 May 1964).
[5] *Al-Jumhûriyyah* (Baghdad, 27 May 1964, 15 July 1964, and 19 July 1964).
[6] *Ibid.* (Baghdad, 17 July, 1964).
[7] *Pravda* (Moscow, 18 July 1964).

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was qualified with the hope that the government would settle the Kurdish issue fully and ease its anti-communist rhetoric and activities, the Russians failed to coerce the ᶜÂrif regime into stopping its campaign against the ICP.[8] Against this background of the continued decimation of the Party at home, most of the surviving ICP leaders were now to be found residing in Eastern Europe and the USSR. This shadow ICP consisted mainly of those individuals who had left Iraq either because they had been frozen out of the leadership or expelled from the Party and were in the process of being rehabilitated, or because they were prominent cadre members who had been sent abroad either for their own protection, or to recuperate, or as scholarship recipients. All now found themselves faced with the responsibility for rebuilding the Party from the ground up and doing so without displeasing their hosts.

This difficult task fell on the Party's overseas organizational structure, the *Lajnat Tanẓîm al-Kẖârij* (the Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad), which at the time was headed by ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm al-Nâṣirî (Anwar Muṣṭafâ). Al-Nâṣirî, who had been living in Moscow for the previous three years, was now the highest-ranking ICP leader and Politburo member outside Iraq. Al-Nâṣirî was familiar with, and had personal relationships with, the CPSU leadership by virtue of his position in Moscow. He developed good working relations with both the Soviet state and the Party apparatus, to the extent that he became the most trusted figure for both with regard to Iraq. In the absence of any legitimate formal Party leadership, and by virtue of his special position as a link between the international communist movement (including the CPSU) and what was left of the Party at home (following the execution of the secretary-general and the disappearance of the Politburo), al-Nâṣirî emerged as the de facto leader of the Iraqi Party and played a critical role in shaping and rebuilding the shattered organization. The Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad now included the Central Committee members Ḥusain Sulṭân and Nâṣir ᶜAbbûd; candidate for Central Committee membership ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj; Thâbit Ḥabîb al-ᶜÂni; and Arâ Khâjâdûr, as well as two prominent advanced cadre members, Nûrî ᶜAbd-ul-Razzâq Ḥusain and ᶜAbd-ul-Raḥîm ᶜAjînah.[9]

At the end of 1963, ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm al-Nâṣirî convened in Prague the first meeting of the Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad, to discuss Party matters and deal with the aftermath of Party's devastation. His evaluation of the ᶜÂrif regime and its policies were heavily influenced by the new official Soviet direction towards the UAR and the Arab world. To conform to the Soviet assessment, al-Nâṣirî called for a re-examination of the ICP's position, indicating that this would meet with the approval of international communism because of the shift in Soviet ideological policy regarding the non-capitalist path to development, in which "progressive" Arab regimes such as the UAR, Syria, and Iraq were seen as leading examples. Under these circumstances, the Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad assumed the leadership

[8] *Ibid.* (13 August 1964).

[9] Ṣalâḥ al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkẖ al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq* (Beirut: Dâr al-Furât, 1993), p. 120; and ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, *Ḥadatha Baina al-Nahrain* (Paris: n.p., 1997).

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of the Party, utilizing resources put at their disposal by the Soviets. The committee assigned ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, the flamboyant and experienced Party journalist and theoretician, to oversee the "Voice of the Iraqi People," a radio station in Sofia, Bulgaria. The station became the Party's only public voice and channel of communication to Iraqis, giving the committee a virtual monopoly on the dissemination of information between the leadership and cadre at home and abroad. In essence, the committee's decisions and actions became de facto Party policy. However, the committee's room to manoeuvre was extremely restricted by its dependence on Soviet support and its close proximity to CPSU control.

The manifold tasks that faced the committee involved rebuilding the Party, conforming to the new Soviet line, reactivating the ICP's role on the Iraqi political scene, and regrouping the progressive elements inside and outside Iraq. To achieve these goals, the committee constructed a worldwide network under the rubric of the Movement for the Defence of the Iraqi People, which was overseen by a supreme committee dominated by al-Nâṣirî. The Movement also published *Al-Ghad*, a bi-monthly newspaper. In April 1964, in East Berlin, a new United National Front, patterned on the 1957 and 1959 models, arose from the movement. Its stated aims were to:

> serve the interests of the Iraqi people with all its nationalities and classes, work for complete national liberation, democracy, and social and economic progress, solve the Kurdish issue on the basis of accepting the legitimate national rights of the Kurdish people, genuinely participate in the Arab national liberation movement, follow the policy of positive neutralism, combat imperialism, and safeguard international peace.[10]

To this end, the Front appealed to "all political parties, groups, anti-reactionary and anti-imperialist elements, regardless of their ideologies and orientations, to work together in this United National Front."[11]

One by-product of the discussions of the Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad was a public evaluation of the Party's activities and leadership during the preceding five years. According to ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, right from the start of these meetings, a rift opened among the leaders over the nature of the new regime. Al-Ḥâjj, supported by Arâ Khâjâdûr, Nûrî ᶜAbd-ul-Razzâq Ḥusain, and ᶜAbd-ul-Raḥîm ᶜAjînah, contended that the ᶜÂrif coup was a continuation of the old 8 February Baᶜth regime. In response to the increased vocal opposition of al-Ḥâjj and his group, al-Nâṣirî suspended the committee meetings, removed al-Ḥâjj from his radio station post, and took charge of the station himself. By the time the Kurdish ceasefire occurred in February 1964, al-Nâṣirî had convinced both the Kurdish and the ICP home leaderships to endorse the ceasefire agreement. In addition, during the meeting of Arab communist parties that was held in Moscow in April of that year, he persuaded the delegates to "bless" the ceasefire, and telegraphed ᶜÂrif to that effect.[12] Al-Nâṣirî then moved to

[10] *Al-Ghad*, no. 2 (Prague, May 1964), p. 1.

[11] *Ibid.* [editorial], no. 3 (July 1964), p. 4.

[12] ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, *Maᶜa al-Aᶜwâm: Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq Baina, 1958–1969* (Beirut: al-Mûʾassasah al-ᶜArabiyyah lil Dirâsât wa al-Nashr, 1981), pp. 182–192.

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convene *al-Kâdir al-Mutaqaddim fî al-Khârij* (the Advanced Cadre Abroad), and without consultation with the Central Committee, he rehabilitated ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah, Bahâᵓu-d-Dîn Nûrî, and their old comrade Thâbit Ḥabîb al-ᶜÂni and gave them a full voice in the meeting.

Al-Nâṣirî continued to act as if he were in charge: he espoused the Soviet line fully, endorsed the ᶜÂrif regime, and disregarded the opposition of ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj and his three prominent comrades. According to ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, an announcement was broadcast to Iraq, contrary to Party by-laws, on the Voice of the Iraqi People radio station, as if the Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad had unanimously approved it for members abroad.[13] Indeed, the pronouncement eventually appeared as the Central Committee statement "For Strengthening National Independence, for Genuine Democratic Government, and Toward an End to the Dictatorship and the Abnormal Situation in the Country," which condemned the overthrown Baᶜthist regime as

> the willing tool of the imperialists, a sworn enemy of the democratic movement with an insatiable lust for power. . . . To cover up their actions . . . the Baᶜthists used the slogan of Arab unity . . . and in the course of accomplishing the February coup, the Baᶜth leadership went even further and concluded a secret deal with the Anglo-American intelligence services and oil companies. . . . Despite its ruthless measures it was unable to destroy the Communist Party.[14]

The report claimed that a crisis that had begun to develop was eventually resolved in favour of the national movement by the coup of 18 November 1963, in which Nasserite elements and other nationalists participated, and noted:

> Under the impact of mounting discontent among the people and the armed forces, the November coup was compelled to direct its main blow at the fascist regime. The ultra-reactionary Baᶜthist clique, the tool of the imperialists, was removed from the helm of the government. The fascist National Guard was disbanded. These measures conformed to the wishes of the people, and were indeed the result of their struggle and sacrifices. This inevitably led to a slackening of the terror against the people and helped to create more favourable conditions for the national-democratic movements. The Party considers that political independence is indispensable for completing national liberation and securing the economic independence of the country. Our Party, as before, resolutely opposes all views and trends which underestimate the importance of the cause of national independence and subordinate it to other, less important matters. . . . Imperialism is "Enemy No. 1," not only of national independence, but also of democracy both in Iraq and in all other Arab countries. The imperialists realize full well the importance of democracy for strengthening the national-liberation movement and enhancing the vigilance and militancy of the masses. . . . Our Party considers that the best way to strengthen national independence would be to establish a national-democratic regime in conformity with the will of the people, and in accordance with a republican democratic constitution guaranteeing the rights of the people.[15]

[13] Ibid., pp. 192–197.
[14] *World Marxist Review*, information bulletin, no. 17 (25 August 1964), pp. 33–35.
[15] Ibid., pp. 39–40.

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The Central Committee report called for support for this potentially progressive ʿÂrif regime and expressed the Party's willingness to cooperate with the regime provided that it widen its popular base and relax its control to allow national forces to participate in the creation of the United National Front. In keeping with typical Soviet doctrine of the 1960s, the report stated:

> The key to the solution of the problems facing the national movement is a tried and tested way to a regime representing the will and interests of all the anti-imperialist classes. . . . today our people need unity more than ever before in order to restore the United National Front, which is a guarantee of the solution of the present crisis in the interests of the people, a barrier to imperialist conspiracies and military gambles of the reactionaries, and a means of effecting the transition to a normal democratic life in the country.
>
> All patriotic parties and strata, communists, democrats and other patriots, nationalists fighting imperialism . . . must draw a lesson from past experience, and take an active part in setting up the United National Front as a union of all the political forces opposed to imperialism and reaction.
>
> While working for the alliance of all the anti-imperialist forces without exception, our Party does not rule out bilateral cooperation with any individual organization or patriotic force. The Party sincerely stretches out a hand to all who are prepared to cooperate on the basis of all, or part of, the common aims.
>
> In the Party's opinion, agreement on limited joint actions by patriotic forces in day-to-day struggles could be a preliminary step towards subsequent cooperation at a higher level in building the United National Front.[16]

In effect, this report opened the door for the full implementation of the Soviet line by Iraqis and served notice that the ICP was willing to cooperate with all national forces as well as with the ʿÂrif regime. On 20 June 1964, al-Nâṣirî issued an internal memorandum to members indicating the Party's complete adherence to the Soviet line and its change in policy towards the ʿÂrif regime, which it described as "anti-imperialist" while pointing out its "anti-democratic" leadership:

> Our Party refuses to raise the slogan of overthrowing the existing government in Baghdad, but rather, will follow the tactic of endorsing and strengthening its national content, by supporting every national and progressive measure it undertakes, and will further struggle . . . to encourage the rulers to follow a decisive national policy against imperialism and its supporters . . . and a democratic policy, respond to the interests of our people and align itself with the governments of Cairo and Algiers.

A month later, in July 1964, ʿÂrif put his nationalization measures into action; this was considered to be further proof of the progressive nature of the regime and was endorsed by the leadership of the ICP. The ICP immediately called for the "masses and decent forces in the country to unite and consolidate their ranks . . . in order to safeguard these measures and strengthen them."[17] One

[16] Ibid., pp. 42, 43.

[17] A statement by the ICP on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the 14 July 1958 revolution (middle July 1964).

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month later, in August 1964, and for the first time, a Central Committee plenary session took place outside Iraq, further indicating the changes in the Party's decision-making process and widening the gap between the leadership and the grass roots.

Almost inevitably, frustration with this new decision-making process expressed itself in schisms and continuous tension between the Central Committee and the Politburo, and the Party's grass roots. Splits within and among these groups resulted in the fragmentation of the ICP and ultimately, over the next thirty years, of almost all political influence in Iraq. By the time of the Prague plenary session and the re-establishment of the Party structure through the election of the Central Committee, Politburo, and secretary-general, the Party programme was almost completely a Moscow decision and put in motion for the ICP by the Committee for the Organization of Members Abroad.

In its post-meeting final communiqué, the Party announced the selection of a new secretary-general, ʿAzîz Muḥammad, whose Kurdish section of the Party was then the most intact of the Party's sections in Iraq. The naturally pleasant and diplomatic ʿAzîz Muḥammad was also the least controversial of the possible candidates. The plenary session report expressed the Party's willingness to collaborate with the regime, justifying this tactic in theoretical terms:

> The positive position taken by our Communist Party toward the Arab Socialist Union sprang from the progressive thoughts, espoused or called for by the progressive elements in this organization, and based also on the potential future transformations in the composition of its leadership and future programmes. . . . our Party will not take a negative stand against this organization. On the contrary, it will take all necessary steps to cooperate with it, to strengthen the progressive nature of its policy, and [to] advance its ideology.[18]

A few weeks later, *Pravda* reported on the meeting's resolutions, which declared that Iraq was now "moving towards the non-capitalist path," praised the Arab Socialist Union as an anti-imperialist organization committed to social progress and Arab unity, and declared the ICP's support for the ʿÂrif regime.[19]

The new Politburo now included Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî, ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ullah, Bâqir Ibrâhîm al-Mûsawî, and ʿAbd-ul-Salâm al-Nâṣirî, in addition to Secretary-General ʿAzîz Muḥammad. These members, who had rallied around Qâsim, and in 1968, around the Baʿth regime, now became staunch supporters of what was labelled "the August Line." Although the plenum resolutions of the August meeting were not published, excerpts appeared in the *World Marxist Review* three months later.[20] They describe the Algerian and Egyptian revolutions as having moved beyond the framework of political independence and

[18] *Fî Sabîl Wiḥdat al-Qiwâ al-Waṭaniyyah wa al-Taqaddumiyyah*; *fî Sabîl Taʿzîz al-Istiqlâl al-Waṭanî wa al-Taqaddum al-Ijtimâʿî* [Toward the Unity of the Nationalist and Progressive Forces for the Sake of Strengthening Our National Independence and the Report of the Central Committee of the ICP] (Prague, August 1964), pp. 32, 33.

[19] *Pravda* (Moscow, 4 September 1964).

[20] *World Marxist Review*, vol. 7, no.1 (November 1964), p. 83.

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as now influencing the struggle of the Arab and African people. Arab unity, as advocated by the two regimes, now had a "more progressive content." The report praised the November coup as "an action which ended the nightmare of fascist rule and created more favourable conditions for the struggle of the anti-imperialist forces, for the preservation of national independence, [for] changing official policy and returning Iraq to the camp of Arab liberation." The measures taken by the new Iraqi government corresponded to the interests of the people, such as stopping the war against the Kurds, creating a National Oil Company Law, improving relations with the UAR (including signing a coordination agreement with it), stressing the policy of peace and non-alignment, trying to restore and improve relations with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, and advancing nationalization laws.[21] The report continued:

The present regime, if it wants to strengthen and deepen the anti-imperialist trend, if it wants to pursue a progressive policy similar to that of the fraternal UAR and Algeria, must follow the example of the leaders in Cairo and Algiers in pursuing a clear and firm policy against imperialism and its agents. In this way it would safeguard the just oil rights of Iraq, implement and deepen agrarian reform, and release the political prisoners and detainees.

The Party will support all the patriotic and progressive measures taken by the present regime. It supports the co-ordination agreement between Iraq and the UAR and the steps towards unity, which will follow from it. It extends the hand of cooperation to all organizations and groups determined to uphold national independence, and will support the government in following a policy similar to that of the UAR and Algerian governments.

Our Party will, as it has always done, continue to fight for the just rights of the people. It determines its position on the basis of the attitude of the regime vis-à-vis imperialism (in its old and new forms), the demands of the workers, peasants and the masses of the people, and the problem of planned economic development, industrialization and social progress.

The Central Committee meeting stresses that imperialism was and remains the chief enemy of our people. Iraq is still at the crossroads. It has not yet achieved economic independence, and will not do so until it wrests its oil wealth from the grip of imperialist monopolies, and until it establishes industries on the basis of modern technology.

The tasks facing our country are the complete liquidation of imperialist positions, namely the economic positions, the realization of radical social and democratic changes, and above all, agrarian reform.

The meeting notes that the new developments in the Arab world, and on the international scene, open before Iraq the possibility of taking the non-capitalist way of development now being followed by the UAR and Algeria.

The meeting sees the problem of Arab unity in the context of the new developments on the Arab scene – the non-capitalist path and social progress, which enrich the progressive content of the Arab unity movement, and make it a movement aiming at both national and social liberation.

The Party is fighting, as it always has done, for the unity of all the anti-imperialist forces without exception, to uphold and consolidate national independence, and for

[21] **Ibid., p. 83.**

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democracy and social progress. Our Party declares its readiness to conclude bilateral and multilateral alliances with all forces concerned with realizing social transformations and opting for the non-capitalist way for Iraq.[22]

The plenum paid lip service to the principle of collective leadership and called on members to:

close their ranks, sharpen their vigilance, consolidate the unity of their glorious party, strengthen discipline, and stand firm in the face of all forms of opportunism. The basic danger against which our Party should concentrate the ideological struggle in the present period is dogmatism and "leftist" [revisionist] sectarianism, which has its tradition in the revolutionary movement in Iraq, and has now suitable objective [existing] conditions on both the local and international levels.[23]

An article by Munîr Aḥmad (Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî) – once again a member of the Politburo – appeared in the December 1964 issue of *World Marxist Review* and was, in effect, an elaboration of the the August Line in tactics, strategy, and theory.[24] The article echoed the new Soviet line and operationalized the August resolutions. This signalled the ICP's abandonment of the classic communist doctrine that the leadership of the working class is essential; it advanced the idea that the "petit bourgeoisie . . . has to play an active part in the national struggle,"[25] and indicated that the Party was ready to be partners with these forces in leading the country towards the non-capitalist path through peaceful means. With this reasoning, the author dissociated the ᶜÂrif regime from the Baᶜth and portrayed it as a potentially progressive government:

Under Baᶜthist rule there could be no question of non-capitalist development for Iraq. The reactionary policy of the government was a mockery of the socialist ideas it professed. However, the weakness of the regime soon became apparent and shortly after the February putsch it found itself in an embarrassing situation. The democratic forces, having not yet fully recovered from the heavy losses inflicted by the Baᶜthist coup, and being not sufficiently united, were unable at this juncture to take the initiative and find a way out of the crisis. In these circumstances a group of army officers, former members of the Baᶜthist party, staged another *coup d'état* on 18 November 1963, and overthrew the Baᶜthist government, a move that ended the fascist regime and created more favourable conditions for the struggle to consolidate national independence, and enable Iraq to rejoin the mainstream of the Arab national-liberation movement.[26]

Despite its criticism of ᶜÂrif's oppressive domestic policy vis-à-vis Kurds and communists, this article clearly rehabilitated the regime, which it judged to have taken definite steps in the interests of "our people." The article emphasized that future cooperation between the ICP and the ᶜÂrif regime hinged on the

[22] **Ibid., p. 83.**
[23] Ibid., pp. 84, 85.
[24] "The Situation in Iraq and the Policy of the Communist Party," *World Marxist Review*, vol. 7, no. 12 (December 1964), pp. 37–41.
[25] Ibid., p. 39.
[26] Ibid., p. 37.

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regime's adopting a non-capitalist path of development. It declared that the Iraqi communists were "revising their method of struggle for political alliances in the light of this non-capitalist perspective," thus opening the door to the possibility of co-optation by the new regime. The Party declared:

> The present leaders will not be able to steer the country onto the path the UAR and Algeria have taken unless they drastically change their policy, and unite all the progressive forces of the country. However, we believe that the struggle of the people to consolidate national independence and carry out radical socio-economic reforms, combined with progressive steps by the government, under the impact of the international situation, and the changes in the Arab world, can lead to changes in the government's policy in a democratic direction. This can be achieved, provided all the national forces – communists, democrats, nationalists, Arabs, Kurds, and other national minorities – unite in a common program of action. The choice of the non-capitalist path need not necessarily hinge on the removal of the present government. The transition could be effected by gradually changing the social structure of the government through support for those of its measures, which conform to the interests of the people, and by combating all anti-democratic moves.[27]

Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî further committed the Party when he declared that its main aim was the achievement of the "non-capitalist way," and that "we have changed our views on this question and are willing even to disband the Party and amalgamate with the regime's single organization, the Arab Socialist Union, just as the Egyptian Communist Party was in the process of doing."[28] The Nûrî article concluded:

> Our attitude to the present regime is a tactical problem that can be solved, depending on the situation and on the position taken by the government. The possibility of the non-capitalist path for Iraq is an objective process that does not depend on the will or desire of anyone within or without the government. The movement in favour of taking the non-capitalist approach is steadily gaining momentum, representing a social force which, despite the difficulties and obstacles, is capable of imposing its will.
>
> The Communist Party is working to give to the slogan of the non-capitalist path a political impact, powerful enough to influence any government in Iraq, and compel it to adopt this path or step down. We communists are not the only ones who advocate this idea. The communists are revising their methods of struggle for political alliances in the light of this non-capitalist perspective.
>
> The Communist Party is ready to cooperate with the Arab Socialist Alliance in the fight against imperialism, and for democracy, social progress, and solidarity and unity with the UAR and other fraternal Arab countries. At the same time, we say that the Socialist Alliance must abandon its reactionary anti-communism as being incompatible with the interests of our people. We support the desire of all patriotic groups and elements to join in a single progressive political organization, which would occupy a worthy place in the struggle of our people, and all the Arab countries. However, we believe that this organization should not have a monopoly on the right to political action. We are

[27] Ibid., pp. 37–38.
[28] Ibid., pp. 38–40.

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confidant that time will expose and isolate any reactionary elements that try to capitalize on nationalist slogans.

In the past, the Communist Party held that the establishment of a popular regime, under the leadership of the working class, was an essential prerequisite for the realization of radical social reforms and for building socialism in Iraq. In the new conditions, with [this] struggle for the non-capitalist path as the general political line of our party, we have changed our views on this question. We believe that at this given stage the best government in Iraq would be a coalition of all the patriotic forces fighting for complete emancipation and social progress.[29]

Grassroots Reaction to the August Line

In January 1965, ICP Secretary-General ʿAzîz Muḥammad (alias Nâẓim ʿAlî), moved to Moscow to further his education at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), as he had had very little formal education and wished to strengthen his understanding of Marxism. While there, he praised the positive changes taking place in the Arab liberation movement.[30] Thus, the new Party leadership moved fully into line with the Soviets, creating tension with dissident groups both outside and inside Iraq, who openly expressed their dissatisfaction.

ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj continued his subtle opposition to the direction of the Party leadership. As early as April 1964, in his capacity as the ICP representative on the editorial board of the *World Marxist Review*, he utilized the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the ICP to write a veiled attack on the ʿÂrif regime. While still paying lip service to the CPSU, he noted:

The Iraqi communists are fighting to end the present military rule and establish a patriotic government of national coalition which will guarantee democratic rights (freedom for political parties, for trade unions and for the press), release of the victims of the fascist terror, genuinely free elections, to ensure a democratic solution to the Kurdish question, and to take a decisive stand against imperialism and the robbery effected by the foreign oil companies. The Iraqi Communist Party, a unit in the international communist army, has always held aloft the banner of proletarian internationalism. It has educated its members, supporters and the working people to support the great Soviet Union and its Communist party. Fahd said, "The enemy of the October Revolution is the enemy of our national cause."[31]

In addition, ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj took his criticism of the August Line to the Movement for the Defence of the Iraqi People and published his complete rejection of the August Line in its newspaper, *Al-Ghad*:

What is needed in Iraq today is not a one-party [organization]. . . . what is needed is a national, unified, broad front that will encompass the major political parties . . . and the elements and groups that are anti-imperialist and anti-reactionary. . . . The Pan-Arabist

[29] Ibid.

[30] *Pravda* (Moscow, 22 January 1965); see also *Al-Wasat*, no. 288 (London, 4 August 1997), p. 31.

[31] "The True Champion of the Working People," *World Marxist Review*, vol. 7, no. 3 (April 1964), p. 42.

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groupings that talk about the proposed unified organization . . . will do much better if they amalgamate themselves into a Pan-Arabist party. . . . This is their natural right. However, it is not their right, at all, to impose this party, by force or the usage of state agencies, on the entire nation. It is not their right to try to monopolize political action, and deprive the other political parties of it.[32]

Perhaps because of his non-conformity with the August Line, ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj was replaced by Zakî Khairî as the ICP representative on the *World Marxist Review*.[33] One of his last official acts before his replacement arrived in Prague occurred in the middle of June 1965, at a public forum, the "Problem of the National Liberation Movement of the Arab People," where he deliberated with other Arab communist theoreticians on the notion of "Arab socialism," in an attempt to reconcile it to the new Soviet evaluation. Along with the sponsor of the August Line, ʿAbd-ul-Salâm al-Nâṣirî (Anwar Muṣṭafâ), al-Ḥâjj represented the Communist Party of Iraq. Al-Ḥâjj continued his low-key agitation against the August Line, opposing the accepted position by questioning the "non-capitalist path," the UAR as a model of non-capitalist development, and Nasserism as a successful socialist experiment. He noted that although in the UAR Nasserism was a progressive ideology and, in the long run, could develop in a revolutionary socialist direction:

> Nasser's "Arab socialism" is not scientific. His ideology is a mixture of scientific, utopian, religious and other ideas . . . [and] his ideology and practice should be examined in the process of development. From an ideological point of view, the UAR leaders have progressed from frank hostility to scientific socialism to borrowing and utilizing some of its ideas, albeit in distorted form. This general evolution of ideology should be taken into account. . . . The weakest link in that country, however, is the lagging of the political and ideological superstructure behind the revolutionary nature of the basis, in particular the exclusion of the masses from broad and vigorous participation in the government of the country.[34]

Al-Ḥâjj's agitation extended beyond formal Party leadership meetings and publications to public venues, and in early February 1965, while attending an Iraqi student meeting in Prague, he openly criticized the ʿÂrif regime and called for its overthrow. His final protest before he was replaced on the *World Marxist Review*'s board was published under a pseudonym in March 1965, and entitled "Freedom for the Patriots in Iraq." Since he had been a long-standing editorial board member, the *World Marxist Review* must have either approved or solicited the article. In this article, the author reminds his readers that the Iraqi regime was continuing to fill prisons with thousands of communists, who were mistreated and whose conditions had worsened. This was in spite of the ʿÂrif regime's promise

[32] "On the Unified Popular Organisation . . . or the Pan-Arabist Unified Organisation," *Al-Ghad*, no. 2 (Prague, May 1964), pp. 15–16.

[33] Zakî Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram* (Göttenberg, Sweden: Arabiska Bokstavscentre, 1996), pp. 363–364; *World Marxist Review*, vol. 7, no. 9 (July 1964), pp. 74–82.

[34] *World Marxist Review*, vol. 7, no. 9 (Sept. 1964), p. 58.

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to restore law and order, and end the barbarous crimes of the Baʿthist regime. This pledge was honoured only in part. All that the government has done is to correct its own injustice, while doing nothing at all to abolish the acts of lawlessness committed by the previous Baʿth regime.

Commenting on these developments, the Beirut newspaper *al-Nahâr* stated that the total number of those to be released was not known. There is reason to believe that about 1,000 prisoners have been released. But even if this figure is correct, it means that only a tenth of those arrested at the time of the Baʿthist coup of February 1963 will be set free. . . . Meanwhile, still larger protest campaigns, and still greater pressure by public opinion throughout the world, can do much to improve the conditions of the Iraqi political prisoners and wrest them from the dungeons.[35]

As a result of these activities, the ICP leadership accused al-Ḥâjj of having worked from 1965 to divide the Party.[36] In the meantime, the Party leadership attempted to silence the voices of criticism against the ʿÂrif regime. In February 1965, it sent Nazîhah al-Dulaimî, one of its Central Committee members and a former Qâsim cabinet minister, to London to restrain the zeal of anti-ʿÂrif Iraqi communist groupings. At that time, these groups were successfully soliciting the support of British human rights organizations that were preparing for a conference on the treatment of political prisoners in Iraq. Khâlid Aḥmad Zakî, an ICP official who was responsible for the student section in England, was the most active Iraqi student leader in Britain at that time and had worked for over six months to secure the sponsorship of these human rights organizations. He explained how:

> I was so incensed that the Party leadership was trying to silence us, and ask us formally to reduce our involvement in this prestigious public forum, after we had worked so hard to enlist its support and sponsorship, so much so that I lost my temper in dealing with Dr Dulaimî, and most of those present in that meeting were about to walk out. Hearing and seeing this, Dulaimî had to modify her demands and tone, asking us only to reduce our antagonistic stance, especially when we spoke in the name of the Party. This was an eye-opener for me, as I discovered, to my dismay, there were some delicate negotiations via the UAR to open further dialogue with the ICP that would lead to the relaxation of the oppression, and effect further democratic changes. I began to see the degree of the leadership's corruption and the need for reform.[37]

Conference sponsors were the prestigious Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, the British Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Iraq, and the Supreme Committee of the Movement for the Defence of the Iraqi People, in which the ICP itself was an active member. The final communiqué of the London conference condemned the ʿÂrif regime for its treatment of political prisoners and called for a worldwide campaign for their release. This was reported in *Pravda* as a news item and without commentary.[38] However, the conference

[35] Ibids., vol. 18, no. 3 (March 1965), p. 80.
[36] *Munâḍil al-Ḥizb*, vol. 14, no. 7 (mid-October 1968); see also al-Ḥâjj, *Maʿa al-Aʿwâm*, p. 222.
[37] Interview by author with Khâlid Aḥmad Zakî, London (17 March 1965).
[38] *Pravda* (Moscow, 10 February 1965).

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produced an immediate response from President ʿÂrif, who, in a speech at the opening session of the Baghdad Industrial Conference on 11 February 1965, vehemently attacked the British human rights groups as agitators trying to interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq.[39]

ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj's dissenting voice continued and was heard by ever wider audiences. He decided to write a critical evaluation of the Party to be entitled "The August Line." It was to be distributed to the Party cadre. Zakî Khairî, who was then also claiming to share these ideals, supported this initiative and agreed to co-write the work with al-Ḥâjj, but he withdrew his endorsement at the last minute after joining the board of the *World Marxist Review*. This post gave him the chance to be reunited with his wife and child for the first time since his marriage; they had been living in Moscow since the Party had banished him to the Middle Euphrates in the middle of 1962. ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj continued to take his efforts to the public, however, and wrote an article in English for the British Communist Party newspaper *The Labour Monthly*, which criticized the August Line, attacked the ʿÂrif regime, and called the regime's its overthrow.[40] However, in her February 1965 visit to London, Dr Nazîhah al-Dulaimî succeeded in stopping publication of the article, and al-Ḥâjj was reprimanded by the Central Committee, which regarded his activities as a breach of Party discipline.

At the same time, on the ground in Iraq and Egypt, while the Iraqis were speaking of unity with the UAR, Nasser was being much less forthcoming than the pro-unionist Iraqis wished, almost certainly because of his negative experience with his first attempt at unity; for example, the formation of the UAR with Syria in February 1958, and its subsequent break-up in September 1961. Furthermore, and despite its pretence of social and economic progress, the ʿÂrif regime was suffering from many setbacks at home. Unemployment had soared, so that by autumn 1965 more than twenty thousand workers had been laid off, and the nationalized industries were facing real difficulties.[41] Nasserite ministers were now at odds with the government because, according to General ʿÂrifʿAbd-ul-Razzâq, President ʿÂrif was not interested in any serious socialist initiatives; his only purpose in employing them had been to gain more popularity as an Arab nationalist, on the back of Nasser's reputation and political clout.[42] Out of the combination of Iraq's economic problems and the government's lack of commitment to socialist reforms, a crisis began to develop between ʿÂrif and his Nasserite ministers. On 4 July, the ministers resigned en masse in protest against obstacles to implementing the socialist measures and against the increasing influence of conservative elements on ʿÂrif's thinking. On 6 September, continuing the pretence of supporting Nasserist notions,

[39] *Al-Jumhûriyyah* (Baghdad, 12 February 1965).

[40] Al-Ḥâjj, *Maʿa al-Aʿwâm*, p. 224; and Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 263.

[41] Ministry of Finance in Iraq, *Taqrîr ʿAn al-Siyâsah al-Iqtiṣâdiyyah fî al-ʿIrâq* (December 1965), p. 12.

[42] Interview by author with ʿÂrif ʿAbd-ul-Razzâq, Cairo (27 December 1971).

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ᶜÂrif appointed Air Staff Brigadier General ᶜÂrif ᶜAbd-ul-Razzâq, a well-known Nasserite, as prime minister. But nine days later he exiled al-Razzâq to Egypt, having accused him of plotting to overthrow the regime while ᶜÂrif was in Casablanca at an Arab summit meeting. In returns, General al-Razzâq accused President ᶜÂrif of orchestrating the entire affair, enticing him to stage the coup only to assure its failure, in a political ploy to portray the Nasserites as "bumbling plotters." To show his own commitment to Nasserism, to continue to exploit its public appeal, and to allay Cairo's fears, the president publicly portrayed the coup attempt as a personal initiative of the general and not as a pro-Nasserist plot.[43] The following day, ᶜÂrif appointed in Razzâq's place a conservative Arab nationalist, ᶜAbd-ul-Raḥmân al-Bazzâz, who had served as ᶜAbd-ul-Razzâq's civilian deputy. A respected law professor and conservative nationalist with Nasserite leanings and good UAR contacts, Bazzâz became the first civilian prime minister since the 1958 coup. This manoeuvre secured Nasser's support, which was essential for a vulnerable regime with little popular appeal and facing the possibility of a Baᶜthist counter coup.[44]

In ICP circles, meanwhile, al-Ḥâjj continued his veiled but now more vocal attacks on the August Line. At the end of February 1965, while in Prague, he published a pamphlet examining non-capitalist development in Iraq, in which he criticized the concept as a non-scientific and ambiguous approach, rejected the inevitable leading role of the petit bourgeoisie; attacked the ᶜÂrif regime as non-democratic, called for the ᶜÂrif regime's overthrow,[45] and posed the question, "How can a rightist military rule lead the country to a non-capitalist goal?"[46] Indirectly, he was criticizing Soviet interference in Iraqi communist affairs, and the naiveté of theoreticians,[47] but he reserved his most scathing attack for the ICP leadership, stating that "communists in every country will serve the aim of the international proletariat . . . to the degree that they adopt a reasonable policy for their country's revolutionary national movement, and to the same degree that they work courageously and firmly to improve this [local] movement."[48]

Al-Ḥâjj did not stop with this critique, and he continued his opposition to the August Line by publishing a limited edition of the revised text of his August 1966 lecture in Brno, Czechoslovakia. The event brought together Iraqi students studying outside the country, and in his lecture, entitled "Observations on Neo-Imperialism and How It Should Be Combated," he attacked the August Line with vigour. While the entire Party leadership was now in either Prague or Moscow, conditions within Iraq were deteriorating further. With virtually no

43 Interview by author with Colonel Ṣubḥî ᶜAbd-ul-Ḥamîd; Col. Rashîd Muḥsin, director of military intelligence under ᶜÂrif, and Col. Hâdî Khammâs, Cairo (24–26 December 1971).

44 *New York Times* (April 15, 1966).

45 *Ḥawla al-Taṭawwur ghair al-Raʾsimâlî fî al-ᶜIrâq: Mulâḥaẓât Shakhṣiyyah* (Prague, 1965), pp. 1–7.

46 Ibid., p. 14.

47 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

48 Ibid., p. 29.

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leadership present in Iraq to direct day-to-day Party operations, its ineffectual response to the crisis in the country marginalized the Party.

While the ICP languished in internal disarray, ʿÂrif gradually consolidated his personal power within the army; he also dissolved the National Council of the Revolutionary Command in early September 1965 and transferred its legislative powers to the cabinet, leaving defence and internal security to a National Defence Council whose membership came predominantly from the military and therefore, was loyal to him personally. Al-Bazzâz introduced a political framework for ʿÂrif's ideology under the rubric of "mature Arab socialism." This became the new orientation of the cabinet, at the same time further reducing the socialist character of the previous Nasserite-oriented programmes. ʿÂrif also continued to conciliate conservative elements through a balance of private- and public-sector economic initiatives; all the while he paid lip service to Nasserism and cooperation with the UAR in order not to lose populist appeal.

Some relaxation of government controls and restrictions, and the need to return to operations on the ground, encouraged the ICP leadership to return to Iraq. The three newest members of the Central Committee, Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, and ʿAbd-ul-Salâm al-Nâṣirî, slipped back into the country during the winter of 1965.[49] They took charge of the Party and began the process of restructuring it, implementing the August Line through a new administrative structure. These three Central Committee members became the Party's highest policy-making group, supported by the new structure the *Lajnat al-Tanẓîm al-Markazî* (Committee for Central Organization), and in effect they became the entire Central Committee and Politburo for the Party. Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, officially described as simply the most senior Party official residing within Iraq, in reality acted as its secretary-general. However, the widespread grassroots rejection of the August Line now threatend to engulf the entire Party and posed a serious obstacle to the new leadership. According to an internal Central Organization Committee circular, fifty per cent of both the student organization and the Baghdad district – the largest, most active, and most ideological groups in the Party at this time – had resigned in protest against the August Line, while the majority of those who remained were also against it. In addition, the Middle Euphrates and Southern sections reported membership losses of 25 per cent.[50]

Rival factions began to emerge across Iraq to challenge the ICP. In early 1965, a previously unknown group of younger Party members accused the Party leadership of a betrayal of Marxist principles and of complete subservience to Moscow; they expressed their disillusionment with the Soviet policy towards the ʿÂrif regime and, in reaction to the August Line, broke away from the Party. Their 8 March 1965 circular accused the Party of becoming a tool of the Soviets, whom they blamed for the split in the international communist movement. The group evidenced pro-Maoist leanings and identified themselves

[49] Khairî, *Ṣadâ al-Sinîn fî Dhâkirat Shiyûʿî ʿIrâqî Mukhadram*, p. 263.
[50] *Munâḍil al-Ḥizb* (10 September 1965).

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as *al-Lajnah al-Qiyâdiyyah al-ᶜUlyâ li al-Ḥizb al-Shiyûᶜî al-ᶜIrâqî* (Supreme Leadership Committee for the Iraqi Communist Party).

This group described the ICP leadership as "opportunist" and rigid, and as "having nothing in common with communist ideology but the name." It further maintained that "like a parrot repeating what Radio Moscow announces, they [the ICP] wait for their policies to be drawn from Radio Moscow." The group stated that its new organization was committed "to struggle against opportunism, treason and Khrushchevism" and promised that it would follow its own independent approach to communism. In early February 1966, the group issued a widely circulated detailed ideological statement entitled "Observations on the Chinese-Soviet Dispute." The statement traced the roots of the Sino-Soviet split, laying the blame squarely on the CPSU and Khrushchev, accepting the Chinese version of events, and bringing to the attention of the members a supporting publication by the Foreign Language Publishing House in Peking entitled *A Debate on the General Direction of the International Communist Movement*. The group also called on the new CPSU leadership under Leonid Brezhnev, which had come to power in 1964, to correct the errors of the previous Khrushchev regime. It warned the new Soviet leadership that if they did not relinquish control of the international socialist leadership,

> and [did] not punish the surrenderists, revise comments, and correct the dangerous direction [of Marxism-Leninism] and its violation, then our Party, and all other parties and genuine communists in the world, will struggle forever under the leadership of the brotherly Chinese People's Communist Party to expose and isolate the new leaders [of the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev], and march to spread and safeguard Marxism-Leninism for the sake of protecting socialism and peace.

Although the splinter group had no impact on the Iraqi political scene, it continued to grow in size, which gave it the confidence to style itself the one true Marxist-Leninist party that would represent "our people's glory and our national culture," and later to publish a party newspaper, *Kifâḥ al-Shaᶜb* (The Struggle of the People).

In early 1964, a number of leftist officers from the lower echelons of the army and police, many of whom had been expelled from the armed forces during and after the overthrow of Qâsim, began to hold the ICP leadership responsible for the slaughter that had followed the Baᶜthist coup. Calling themselves *al-Lajnah al-Thawriyyah* (the Revolutionary Committee), they identified as the main cause of the Party's problems its faulty leadership and policies. Moreover, they considered the Party's adherence to the August Line to be an extension of its erroneous direction. They began preparing to challenge the ᶜÂrif government by recruiting dissatisfied Party members, especially among the military. In preparation for an "armed struggle," they concentrated their energies on recruting well-known army officers who had joined the Kurdish rebellion in the north after the overthrow of Qâsim and succeeded in enlisting the most senior communist army officer, the respected Staff Lieutenant Colonel Salîm al-Fakhrî. Al-Fakhrî had been expelled from the army in 1949. Released after spending almost ten years

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in prison, he had worked as Qâsim's radio and television director between late 1958 and early 1959. Despite his having formally left the Party, he fell out of favour again during the rift between Qâsim and the communists because of his communist convictions. In late October 1964 al-Fakhrî agreed to lead the proposed coup, after receiving the plotters' exaggerated assurance that they had "thousands [of supporters] in the army and had stashed away enough weapons that their members would be able to use." After he joined the plot, he supplied the group with the names of a proposed new government which would be led by a Revolutionary Popular Council. However, a month later, the conspirators were arrested and their organization withered away. Salîm al-Fakhrî and about four hundred suspects were imprisoned, where they remained until the second Baʿthist coup of July 1968.[51]

In the face of this widespread dissatisfaction and Party fragmentation, the "home" Party leadership, led by Bahâʾu-d-Dîn Nûrî and his colleagues, had no choice but to reassert control. The trio attempted to appear democratic by reflecting cadre wishes and to exercise responsibility while not antagonizing those who held official and legal Party power – the majority of the Central Committee, the Politburo, and the secretary-general, who were all residing outside Iraq. Nevertheless, because of the difficulties in communicating with the leadership abroad, as well as because of increasing pressure at the grass roots, Party action began to suffer a certain paralysis. This only added to the confusion among the grassroots Party membership, and contributed to the creation of two antagonistic power centres, one within Iraq that was forced to deal with the restive cadre, and a second, residing in Eastern Europe, who formulated ICP policies to be more in line with those of the Soviets, and who were less responsive to the rank-and-file membership. The leadership within Iraq asked for instructions from the secretary-general, who responded in March 1965 by giving the green light to a conference for the advanced cadre and the Central Committee then in Iraq, to be held in mid-April in Baghdad. Accordingly, a draft statement was forwarded to the home leadership and circulated on a very limited scale; its basic purpose was to reduce antagonism to the August Line. In March 1965, in order to legitimize this action and to appear more consultative than his predecessors, the secretary-general convened the Central Committee within Iraq for what he expected would be pro forma approval. Although the draft statement did not negate the basic premise of the August Line, it did try to reformulate some of its ideas in more acceptable terms. However, influenced by ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj and Zakî Khairî's opposition to the draft, the Central Committee rejected it on the grounds that it did not address the basic issues of the Kurdish problem and the overthrow of the ʿÂrif regime.[52] The Central Committee then charged ʿAzîz al-Ḥâjj and Zakî Khairî with developing a new draft to be circulated to the advanced cadre in Iraq.[53]

[51] Interview by author with Salîm al-Fakhrî, London (27 February 1990).
[52] Al-Ḥâjj, *Maʿa al-Aʿwâm*, pp. 224–229.
[53] Interview by author with Zakî Khairî, Damascus (18 March 1987).

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Amid mounting pressure, the Central Committee at home followed the instructions from the secretary-general and scheduled a meeting for mid-April to present the original draft statement. Party members in Iraq were unaware of the Central Committee's discussions and revision; the new statement from the secretary-general and the Central Committee did not arrive in time to be considered for the conference. Responding to the general mood of the Party, *Ṭarîq al-Shaʿb*, in its mid-March 1965 issue, mildly criticized the regime for its nationalization measures, suggesting that these could not be understood in isolation from the nature of the regime and the relations of production in Iraqi society. *Ṭarîq al-Shaʿb* argued that the measures "did not result in any fundamental change in the makeup of the regime, its policies, or in the semi-feudal and capitalist relations of production. The oil sector is still, in effect, controlled by multi-national corporations."

To implement the new direction of Soviet foreign policy in the Arab world, Arab communist parties began to shift their rhetoric in early 1964; Nasser was lauded as the main advocate of friendship with the USSR, and his experiment in government was called the best example of non-capitalist development. The ICP leadership also seemed to be moving in this direction. The main source of dissatisfaction lay in the need for new leadership, since those in charge were the same individuals who had participated in the debacle that decimated the Party in 1963. For example, Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, who had been expelled from the Party at that time, was now in charge of the Party. Thus a serious organizational flaw still needed to be addressed through a Party Congress and the election of new leader. The Party leadership began sending some of its most committed functionaries, who were living in Eastern European countries and in the USSR, to Iraq to prepare the intellectual ground. The aim was to take charge of the key sections of the Party, the main one being the Baghdad district; the leadership chose Khiḍr Salmân (Abu Jaʿfar), Ḥusain al-Gumar (Walîd) and Peter Yûsuf to return to Iraq.[54]

Activists also arrived in Iraq from Western Europe, especially Britain, and began to join the Baghdad district. Among the returnees, two important personalities, Najim Maḥmûd in 1958 and, a decade later, Khâlid Aḥmad Zakî (Ẓâfir), introduced fresh ideas that helped mobilize the Baghdad section. Prominent among these ideas was an embrace of protracted civil war and a rejection of the the old guard's reliance on the army as the major instrument of revolutionary change (though they acknowledged the role of revolutionary elements within the army). Both Ẓâfir and Najim Maḥmûd had grievances against the leadership and had openly condemned the August Line from its inception.[55] When the conference was held in mid-April 1965, these grievances surfaced and dissatisfaction marked the deliberations. There was agreement on the need to change Party policy towards the regime, however, and a call for the regime's

[54] Numerous personal interviews with Zakî Khairî, Damascus (18 March 1987); Najim Maḥmûd, Paris (18 May 1982): and ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah, London (18 December 1997).

[55] Central Leadership, *Fî Dhikrâ Istishhâd Khâlid Aḥmad Zakî* (Baghdad, 1971), pp. 30–71.

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overthrow was endorsed. Two views began to emerge on the tactics of gaining power, both of which rejected the August Line in its entirety and accepted the principle of "decisive action"; they disagreed over whether the decisive action should be a military takeover or a popular armed revolution.

In the end, the conference called for the overthrow of the regime through a military coup d'état led by the Communist Party. ʿÂmir ʿAbd-ul-lah championed the view that only after the success of the coup would non-communist opposition forces be invited to assume public leadership roles in the new government, since tight secrecy and a sudden strike against the regime through the army were essential for a successful coup. In contrast, Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî argued for input from opposition forces in the planning and execution of the proposed coup. As a result, separate reports were delivered to the Central Committee members in Europe, presenting each of these positions.

The abridged communiqué from the conference, written by Zakî Khairî, attempted to reflect both views and to acknowledge the Party's grassroots wishes when it declared that "in the future, Party functionaries and rank and file [members] will have a bigger say in determining the attitude of the Party and in formulating its policy."[56] To quell Party unrest, the statement condemned the government and for the first time called for the "overthrow of the dictatorial military regime . . . and for a provisional government of a national coalition . . . for democratic freedoms, for a democratic settlement of the Kurdish question and for reinvigorating the country."[57] The communiqué criticized the actions of the government, pointing out that the number of executions of leftists and communists in a single year under the ʿÂrif regime had exceeded that for the entire monarchical period. The regime's oppression of the Kurdish people was also highlighted, and the communiqué pointed out that

> several thousand communists and democrats [continue to] languish in jail. Power is concentrated in the hands of the military junta, which has deprived the patriotic forces of any legitimacy and freedoms. The present rate of the implementation of the land reform laws is such that it will take twenty-five years to implement.[58]

The communiqué also accused the regime of being a tool of the multinational oil companies. The communiqué paid lip service to the UAR government while noting the UAR's support of the dictatorial regime in Iraq.[59] But by the time the final document was approved by the Central Committee, the session was billed as "Documents of the Plenary Session of the ICP," further details were introduced, and the attack on the ʿÂrif regime was much more explicit:

> The rulers persist in seizing on methods of despotic and dictatorial rule, thereby defying the will of the people and all their patriotic forces. They are using what is called

[56] "The Situation in Iraq and the Position of the Communist Party," *World Marxist Review*, vol. 8, no. 6 (June 1965), p. 80.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., p. 81.

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the "transition period" as a pretext to monopolize political power, maintain abnormal conditions and martial administration or a state of emergency, to enact reactionary and freedom-inhibiting laws. They try to camouflage the dictatorial character of the present military rule by means of the so-called "consultative college," and by forming state security courts. The "transition period" was also used as a pretext for vesting legislative, executive, and even judicial functions in the hands of the command of the armed forces, the presidency of the republic, most of the cabinet portfolios, and in a small clique of highly placed military personnel bent on despotism and on invoking military procedure in administration and rule.

The condemnation by the present rulers of the one-man dictatorship does not prevent them from dedicating all the press and official information organs to deify the present President of the republic, and to portray him as a military dictator with unlimited prerogatives.

The masses of the people and all anti-imperialist forces, irrespective of nationality and political views, are therefore called upon to pool efforts: First, to overthrow the ᶜÂrif-Yaḥyâ military dictatorship, and install a government of national unity embracing all patriotic parties, groups and personalities from among the democrats and anti-imperialist nationalists. Second, this government is to start, forthwith, to eradicate the remnants of the terror and emergency law of the previous dictatorships, ensure democratic liberties, evolve a peaceful and democratic settlement of the Kurdish question, and hold free general elections to transfer the country to parliamentary-constitutional life as a prelude to forming a government emanating from the will of the people.

The report of the plenary session connected the Kurdish issue to the question of democracy in Iraq, and it offered specific solutions to the problem:

The settlement of the Kurdish question is organically bound up with that of democracy and the installation of a democratic regime in Iraq. The governments, which denied the legitimate national rights of the Kurds and oppressed them, are the selfsame governments that simultaneously ignored the democratic rights of the Iraqi people, and oppressed citizens of different views and diverse nationalities.

There will never be a just and solid settlement for the Kurdish question short of complete autonomy for the Kurdish people within the framework of the Iraqi Republic. National unity in Iraq cannot be maintained and consolidated unless account is taken of the legitimate rights of the Kurdish people.

The junta usurping the power has, through its outrageous policy, torn national unity asunder, and has not observed its former pledge to observe the ceasefire agreement of February 1964. Therefore, the Kurdish revolutionary movement has the right to doubt their [good faith] and refuse to lay down their arms until their legitimate demands are met, and constitutional and practical guarantees made to secure and respect these.[60]

On the issue of democracy, the statement was much more explicit in its rejection of the August Line:

In the conditions prevailing in Iraq, democracy assumes a place of prime importance, inasmuch as, in the modern history of Iraq, it has been a pivot of protracted struggle between the people and the reactionary rulers.

[60] *Information Bulletin*, no. 52 (2 September 1965), pp. 22–28.

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Experience has shown that the path to uniting national ranks is that of free party life and optional collaboration in a national front, not that of decrees and administrative orders imposing one particular form of organization. There can be no other alternative than to allow all anti-imperialist parties and groups, irrespective of nationality and political views, to enjoy equal rights to publication and political activity, and to allow the people to choose the ideas and slogans corroborated by life in the course of application, and to discard what is erroneous and futile. . . .[61]

The Arab Socialist Union has the right to be one of the political parties in the country, but cannot [alone] be a substitute for [democratic] party life under conditions in Iraq, which are distinct from those in other Arab countries.[62]

The report also went into detail about the proposed national coalition, citing the following twelve bases for the front:

1. A solid, democratic settlement of the Kurdish question by responding to legitimate Kurdish national rights, including autonomy within the framework of the Iraqi Republic.
2. An amnesty for all those condemned to death, as well as for political prisoners and detainees; a restoration of the rights of citizenship that had been withdrawn from Iraqis, an end to police persecution and "renunciations"; and an inquiry into the perpetrators of crimes of murder, plunder, and sedition under the fascist regime.
3. The reinstatement of servicemen and civilians dismissed for political reasons.
4. Democratic freedoms, including the freedom to publish and to organize parties and trade unions, for all patriotic forces to the exclusion of none.
5. A purge of imperialist agents from state organs.
6. A resolution of the acute living problems of the people, provision of foodstuffs at reasonable prices, combating of speculation in and manipulation of food prices, and an improvement in peoples sanitary and cultural standards.
7. A resolution of the problems of unemployment, an end to wholesale dismissals, the fixing of a reasonable minimum for wages, and guaranteed social security for workers and their families in cases of disease, old age, and death.
8. Restoration of Iraqi's legitimate right to [its own] petroleum, and putting into effect the proposal to establish a national petroleum company.
9. A lowering of the present ceiling on land ownership, revoking payment for land allocated to the peasants, providing peasants with instructions and material aid, and forming an effective body to carry out the agrarian reform.
10. A plan to develop the national economy on a sound scientific basis and with the active participation of the people, and with a view to industrializing the country and developing the state sector of the economy,

[61] Ibid., p. 28.
[62] Ibid., p. 27.

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taking into account the protection of national capital from foreign competition.

11. The consolidation of Arab solidarity; the provision of effective aid to secure Arab rights to Palestine, Aden, and the Arab South; the improvement of Iraqi relations with the UAR and other liberated Arab countries so as to gradually proceed along the path of realizing inter-Arab unity on a solid democratic basis, and with reliance on the will of Arab peoples.
12. The pursuit of a clear policy in the struggle against imperialism, and for peace; the support of national liberation movements; and a consolidation of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist world.[63]

The April session pacified some groups but antagonized others, particularly those of the Baghdad district. They felt that the conference had not addressed substantive issues, such as the accountability of the leadership for the August Line, and when to hold the next Party Congress, the last one of which had been twenty years earlier. Also, a good number of the cadre felt that the April plenary session had only been a delaying tactic to forestall action against the Party leadership, especially when the "decisive action" discussed at the conference had ended up being a military coup rather than a popular revolution. More puzzling, the call for a military take-over was being propagated at a time when the Party was infiltrated by the regime's intelligence services. In addition, the same time, the Central Committee and the secretary-general, looking at events from Eastern Europe, were apprehensive about the call to overthrow the regime. The April resolutions committed the Party to a violent path, which was contrary to the peaceful approach the Party had followed since the secretary-general had assumed office. Moreover, such a policy was contrary to CPSU dictates. In Iraq, preparations were made for a Central Committee meeting in July, at which the resolutions of the April session could be operationalized, thus hastening a confrontation with ᶜÂrif.

Party Leadership Responds to Internal Tensions

By 5 April, ᶜÂrif had broken a ceasefire and resumed his military actions against the Kurds. This initiated a schism between the ᶜÂrif regime and the Nasserist bloc and caused the mass resignation of all the Nasserites from the cabinet on 4 July. The July Central Committee meeting took place in this environment. Its resolutions, which were released at the end of August 1965, reversed the August Line, and rejected the Party's official coexistence policy with the ᶜÂrif regime. The resolutions also branded the regime the most reactionary, chauvinistic, and despotic wing of the ruling class, stating:

The despotism, chauvinism and political reactionism of the government have enraged the people, especially after the aggressive war against the Kurdish people. Such attitudes and

[63] Ibid., pp. 26–27.

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policies have been accompanied by attempts made by . . . ᶜÂrif and his closest supporters to impose a policy that seriously threatens the national interests and, in its essence, is hostile to the Arab liberation movement and the struggle for solidarity and national unity. The attempt to reach a new "agreement of thieves" with the foreign oil monopolies, the failure of the general offensive launched by the forces of the government against the Kurdish revolutionaries, the excessive actions against the interests of the people, the reliance on reactionary elements, and the denial of the supreme national interests have increased the anger and indignation of the people against this government and, at the same time, have increased both the isolation of the regime and the contradictions within it.[64]

In an obvious attempt to discredit the regime, the resolutions declared that the regime had wavered in its course and was no longer in the progressive camp, and thus that it was to be condemned. Cairo was advised to follow suit:

The ᶜÂrif bloc with its policy, which is basically against the interests of the national struggle for liberation, can never be the representative of Arab nationalism in Iraq. Add to this the fact that with its policy, which is hostile to the people, it is inflicting harm on Cairo, its progressive policy and leadership, and the ties of solidarity and brotherhood between the two peoples.[65]

The resolutions censured the ᶜÂrif regime for being oppressive and nondemocratic, and officially signalled the Party's retreat from any further cooperation with the Arab Socialist Union, arguing that

the Socialist Union has failed to prove itself a viable political organization that can rally behind it all national forces, and is today losing the freedom of independent action and thus the ability to become a focal point for the mobilization of the national forces. No doubt, it is going to be subjected to measures that aim at its liquidation or a further weakening, making it completely dependent on the ruling group, and ending by becoming the focal point for the reactionary forces. A situation of this sort will undoubtedly lead to changes in the positions, attitudes, and structures of the various national groups and blocs. It is not impossible, in such circumstances, to see the emergence of new elements, currents, and subsidiary organizations that will show firm opposition to the regime, even if they are few in number and [at present] have little influence.[66]

Finally, the report once again criticized the regime for its aggressive war against the Kurdish people.

After their success at the April and July meetings, the Baghdad section and other Party dissidents were now able to extract concessions from the Party leadership. They moved for the convening of a plenary session of the Central Committee and the advanced cadre. This group urged that all the Party's resources be devoted to implementing the principle of decisive action, and they again called for a condemnation of the August Line and the disciplining of those responsible

[64] *Al-Akbar* (Beirut, 26 September 1965), pp. 3, 7; and *Ṭarîq al-Sha*ᶜ*b* (Baghdad, end of August 1965).
[65] *Al-Akbar* (Beirut, 26 September 1965), pp.3, 7.
[66] Ibid.

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for it, and for a specific date on which to hold a Second Congress that would evaluate both the Party and its activities during the previous decade. Twenty-five Central Committee members and advanced cadre attended this enlarged three-day Central Committee meeting in Baghdad, which began on 9 October and was dubbed in Party circles "the meeting of the twenty-five." Two main working papers, concerning how decisive action could be made operational, were presented. ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah adopted one view, which called for an immediate communist-led army coup since the ᶜÂrif regime was now isolated and possessed little political support following the withdrawal of the Nasserites from government. In addition, the regime had its hands full dealing with the Kurdish rebellion in the north. ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah maintained that once the communists were in power as a result of the "decisive action," the other patriotic forces would rally to the Party's support. He stressed that the time was ripe for action, and if the Party did not seize this opportunity, others might.

The opposing view was represented by Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî, who argued that this was an adventurist policy that could unite all anti-communist forces against the Party, lead to a civil war, and end in the Party's demise. He called for collective action with other patriotic forces to carry out the coup, maintaining that the communists would have to share power with these other forces and might even have to play their role behind the scenes. In the final vote, ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah's position was chosen. Further, the old Central Committee was disbanded, and the new Central Committee that was elected included all the previous members of the Central Committee apart from one, Ḥusain al-Gumar (Walîd), and six new members. Al-Gumar had chaired the Central Organization Committee, antagonized the grass roots, and spearheaded the confrontation with the cadre group. Steps were taken to implement the "decisive action plan" with the creation of two new organizations. A military section was organized among Party members in the armed forces to recruit new members from their ranks, and an armed Party militia was also established to support the planned action.[67] The deliberations of the enlarged Central Committee meeting were communicated to the Central Committee and the secretary-general in Prague, who held a plenary session six weeks later on 18–19 November, to discuss this turn of events. In essence, the secretary-general had to deal with the immediacy of ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah's plan and the contrary conservatism of Bahâ'u-d-Dîn Nûrî. In addition, he had to accept the input of the grass roots on policy and organizational matters, a precedent that necessitated a change in both the Party's by-laws and its practice.

ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj and Zakî Khairî led the opposition to ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah's plan. They considered it to be "irrational," arguing that the proposed coup was being

[67] Al-Ḥâjj, *Maᶜa al-Aᶜwâm*, pp. 229–236; al-Kharsân, *Ṣafaḥât min Târîkh al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, pp. 125–128; Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 1041–1045; Samîr ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm, Iraqi Intelligence Service, *Aḍwâ' ᶜAlâ al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Mirṣâd, 1982), pp. 52–57.

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forced on the grass roots who were not prepared for it. They both favoured a popular revolution that would include other popular forces. Zakî Khairî was very disturbed by what he perceived as violations of Party discipline, and he called the decisions of the enlarged meeting (such as disbanding the old Central Committee and electing a new one) a grass roots "coup" in organizational terms. He accused the trio in Baghdad of whipping the conference into a frenzy by promoting the principle of violence on the pretext that there was no other choice, and he claimed that this was a "cover-up" of the real crisis in the Party leadership. He considered the situation to be extremely serious, since the opposition to the Central Committee and the secretary-general

> is no longer confined to the Politburo, but has moved to the level of the cadre. . . . This situation is dangerous and threatens the leadership of the Party in its ability to direct the Party apparatus. . . . in my opinion, preparing a revolutionary military action requires a central leadership, skilled politically and militarily, and under the control of the secretary-general.[68]

While emphasizing the need for a Party conference, al-Ḥâjj also attacked ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah's report as being unrealistic, and described the trio as "unfit" to occupy the leadership position at home. He declared:

> In my opinion, the central efforts of the Party should, from now on, be directed to diligent and serious preparation for a Party congress. . . . all intellectual and political preparation for such a conference must take place in secrecy, but with a depth of analysis that requires exposing to the cadre all the documents, minutes, and basic theses related to the period, at least from 1963 on, including correspondence between the cadre and the [Central Committee in a discussion of the August Line].[69]

Both Khairî and al-Ḥâjj thought an important ingredient in the maturing of the path to revolution was to pay more attention to the Kurdish revolution and that this had been neglected by both reports, particularly that of ᶜÂmir ᶜAbd-ul-lah. Both also wanted to discuss the Party experience since 1963, though less publicly in Khairî's case.[70]

The secretary-general was cautious in his response to these developments, and he stated from the outset in various respects that the August Line did not seem to be an accurate analysis of the political situation within Iraq:

> Our position vis-à-vis other [national Iraqi] forces and the regime [is incorrect], and the influence of President Nasser on ᶜÂrif has been exaggerated . . . as proved by the issuing of the April pronouncement of the Central Committee. . . . those in charge of the Party [in Baghdad] have a complete right to express their views freely. . . . we attempt to give them specific directions to guide the rest of the cadre, and will provide them with objective facts. . . . My reservation centres around the fact that we might have different evaluations [of the situation], which may seem to incline towards a public exposure of our disagreements, and this is not very healthy. It does not mean that we do not say

[68] ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm, *Aḍwâʾ ᶜAlâ al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, pp. 64–70.
[69] Ibid., pp. 72–76.
[70] Ibid., pp. 61–81.

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anything, and we can even pinpoint specific mistakes and, in the name of the Party, admit to making them. . . . however, in our present situation, it is incorrect to "compete" in exposing our faults. . . . We must confess that the August Line policy was incorrect in a number of ways, particularly vis-à-vis the regime, but [that] the future avenues of cooperation [with other regimes in the future] are correct. . . . We do not have to deal with past Party policies; we need to delineate the present direction. If we offer anything, we must formulate it fully.[71]

ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj, however, stated that, notwithstanding, a fear of admitting mistakes still seemed to exist, and he called for a more open discussion.

The result of the two-day mid-November meeting was a fifteen-page response, drafted on 18 December by the secretary-general with the help of his supporters on the Central Committee, excluding ᶜAzîz al-Ḥâjj and Zakî Khairî.[72] He directed his remarks to the home leadership, in a roundabout way criticizing the tone of the October enlarged Central Committee meeting and describing it as a hastily put together gathering:

Whereas the preparation for the meeting should have been discussed in the Central Committee first, and consultation with the other Central Committee members, outside [the country], should have taken place. All the suggestions advanced on the issue of leadership, which were connected to the concept of decisive action, have no justification. Rather they caused damage to the Party's position. All these suggestions and measures, I am sorry to say, appear to us irregular and irresponsible.

The enlarged meeting had no authority to elect either a temporary or permanent leadership, and what has taken place was in violation of the Party by-laws. In our opinion, this must be corrected.[73]

This response asked not that the decisions be reversed, but that the Party carry on as if they were formal and official until the Second National Congress – for which the rest of the Party leadership would gradually return – could take place in the safety of the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. By then more than one view would be available for consideration.[74] However, in April 1966, the Central Committee plenum returned conditions almost entirely to what they had been previously by reseating the expelled members of the Central Committee and confirming those elected in the October meeting.[75]

On 13 April 1966 the Iraqi political scene dramatically changed when ᶜAbd-ul-Salâm ᶜÂrif's helicopter crashed and he was killed. Three days later, his brother, Major General ᶜAbd-ul-Raḥîm ᶜÂrif, the acting chief of staff, was chosen as his successors; al-Bazzâz continued in his role of prime minister. During the al-Bazzâz period, some oppressive measures against the communists were relaxed, and a certain stability emerged, brought about by the semblance of the rule of law. In an attempt to deal decisively with the Kurdish uprising,

[71] Ibid., p. 64.
[72] Al-Ḥâjj, *Ḥadaṯha Baina al-Nahrain*, p. 85.
[73] ᶜAbd-ul-Karîm, *Aḍwâʾ ᶜAlâ al-Ḥarakah al-Shiyûᶜiyyah fî al-ᶜIrâq*, p. 84.
[74] Ibid., p. 85.
[75] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 1061.

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